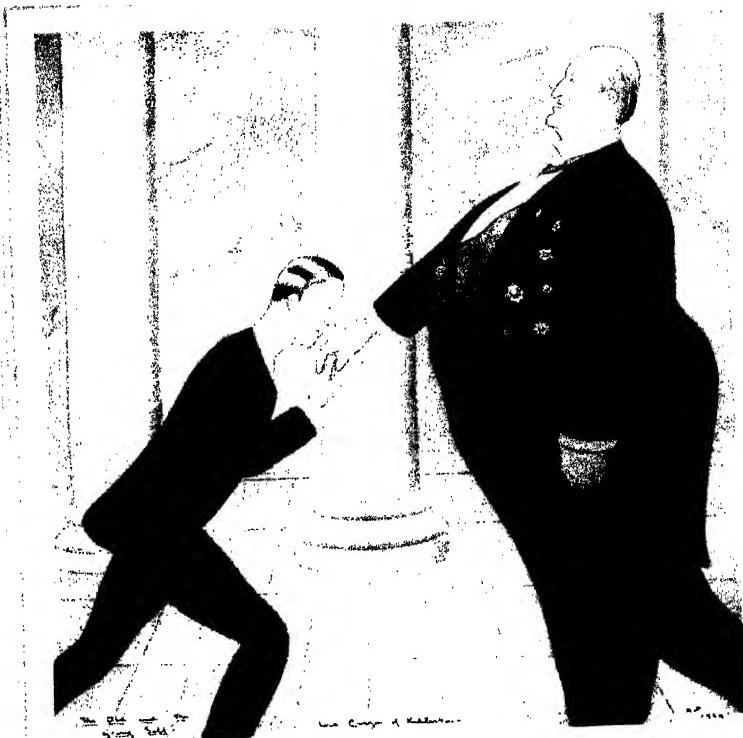




**THE LIFE OF LORD CURZON**

*This is volume II of the edition de luxe of "The Life of Lord Curzon," which is limited to 200 copies for sale, printed on special paper and bound in Oasis Morocco, and of which volume I is signed and numbered by the author.*





THE OLD AND THE YOUNG SELF

By kind permission of  
Mr. Max Beerbohm

THE LIFE OF  
**LORD CURZON**

*Being the Authorized Biography of*

**GEORGE NATHANIEL  
MARQUESS CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G.**

*by*

**THE RT. HON. THE  
EARL OF RONALDSHAY**

---

VOLUME TWO

*VICEROY OF INDIA*

LONDON: ERNEST BENN LTD.  
*Bouverie House, Fleet Street*

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

## PREFACE

THE PAGES which follow cover the period of Lord Curzon's Vice-royalty from December 1898 to November 1905. The system of Government which he found in operation in India was in form and, indeed, in fact, bureaucratic. It lent itself admirably to a display of all those qualities which Lord Curzon possessed in quite unusual measure. And he employed them to such purpose that for seven years he converted what had been a practically unchallenged bureaucracy into something closely resembling a benevolent autocracy. Possessing a comprehensive knowledge of Eastern lands and Eastern peoples, profoundly impressed by the greatness both of the task and of the opportunities which it offered and at the height of his own powers, he dominated the Administration in a way in which few, if any, of his predecessors had done and in which it will never again be given to any Governor-General to do. For these seven years, therefore, biography and history become inextricably interwoven. The history of British rule in India during this time is the story of Lord Curzon's daily life and work.

And here, perhaps, I may be permitted a brief digression in explanation of the form which the authorised story of Lord Curzon's life has taken. The decision to give to the public not merely a portrait of the man, but a record of his work, involving as it did a biography in three volumes, was taken as the result of a dying wish expressed by Lord Curzon himself. India had been the romance of his youth, the consuming passion of his prime, the unforgettable memory of his declining years. When, soured by disillusionment, he sometimes spoke bitterly in later days of the trials and disappointments of public life, it was to India that he always turned for his ideal of what public life and work should be. "In India," he wrote one day

## PREFACE

in 1921, "I was magnificently served. The whole spirit of service there was different. Every one there was out to do something." And it was to India that his thoughts reached back once more when he lay a grievously sick man, stricken even unto death. For it was in India, he believed, if the full story of his Administration was ever told, that he might be held by his fellow men to have laboured not altogether in vain. And with the sands fast running out he breathed a hope that a true and detailed record of the seven years to which he had given all that was worth having of his spirit and strength, might some day be written. It is that hope which I have tried to fulfil in the following pages and which has necessitated the allocation of a separate volume to these seven years of Lord Curzon's life.

One more word of explanation seems called for. It was the tragedy of Lord Curzon's life that India, the stage of his greatest achievements, should have been the scene also of his greatest disaster. The series of events which culminated in his resignation of the Viceroyalty shook him to the foundations of his being and left a scar upon him which he carried to the grave. He believed that he had been the victim of ingratitude and injustice and while he refrained during his own life time from giving his version of the events, he admitted that restraint had often been difficult and he earnestly desired that after his death it might be made known. In the picture of events as he saw it, the attitude of some of those with whom he came into conflict was necessarily such as to excite his censure, and the story has been neither an easy nor an agreeable one to write. Let me only add that just as I have set down nought in malice, so have I made no statement the historical accuracy of which I have not been at pains to verify.

RONALDSHAY.

March, 1928.

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

Favourable reception of the Appointment in India—addresses of welcome—arrival at Government House, Calcutta—the social round—lavish entertainment—the great room in the south-west wing—hours of work—condemnation of departmental methods—an illustration—a programme of twelve great reforms—a proposed amendment of the Calcutta Municipal Act—Lord Curzon's objection to the change suggested—his own proposals—bounty-fed sugar—Lord Curzon's way of dealing with—personal interviews—opinions of men—Sir Lawrence Jenkins—Sir George Roos-Keppel—an attempt on the life of a political officer—two assassinations.

pp. 21-36

### CHAPTER II PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

Russian hostility—Sikhim and Tibet—Nepal—the North West Frontier, a turbulent Alsatia—Lord George Hamilton's Despatch—Lord Curzon's solution of the military aspect of the problem—a moderate and economical policy—the Khyber, Chitral and Samana—public reception accorded to his policy—reasons for abandonment of the Khyber railway project—its construction a quarter of a century later—the question of the control of the frontier districts raised—French activity in the Persian Gulf—Lord Curzon frustrates an attempt to secure a coaling station—Lord Salisbury's embarrassment—opinion of the public—the Muscat crisis behind the scenes—another danger spot, Koweit—Lord Curzon's Agreement with the Sheikh Mubarak . . . . . pp. 37-50

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER III

#### FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

Lady Curzon at Simla—the woe of separation—her fears about Muscat—the love of Warren Hastings for Marian Imhoff—a parallel to it—Lady Curzon's influence—long hours of work and a remonstrance—a visit to Lahore—control of frontier administration—a canal colony—Simla as an administrative workshop—the independence of Madras and Bombay—Lord Curzon and Lord Sandhurst—a reduction in the status of the Presidency Governments proposed—and rejected—lack of control from the centre—examples—a cumbrous mechanism—an amazing illustration of its working—a new code of regulations—a humorous example of how it worked—the lasting effect of Lord Curzon's reforms.

pp. 51-66

### CHAPTER IV

#### CLOUDS IN THE SKY

The murmurings of a coming storm—war in South Africa—India's contribution—fears of drought—preparations for combating famine—collisions between soldiers and the natives of the Country—the Rangoon outrage—Lord Curzon's attitude—an Order in Council—criticism of the Viceroy—approval of the Indian press—the Calcutta Municipal Bill once more—a storm of indignation—the curtain lifted on the future—the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1923—a trip into the hills—famine reports—measures taken to cope with the situation—progress with the twelve questions—a summing up of the first Simla season . . . . .

pp. 67-79

### CHAPTER V

#### A WEARY AND DRY LAND

The hills in autumn—the plains—the abomination of desolation—the humanity of British rule—pages from the Old Testament—inspection of relief works—a visit to Kathiawar—Lady Curzon looks on from Simla—the danger of relief given with too free a

## CONTENTS

hand—a state visit to Bhopal—the pomp and pageantry of the East—a recalcitrant Chief—a model Chief—a homily to the Princes—the duty of a Ruling Chief—a sensational circular—a Durbar at Lucknow—the Viceroy's speech—end of the tour—contact with ancient buildings—a great programme of restoration decided on—Lord Curzon's reverence for the past . . . pp. 80-97

## CHAPTER VI

### WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

The achievements of the first year—first signs of disagreement between the Viceroy and the Home Government—Persia a source of conflict between Lord Curzon and the Secretary of State—the effect of the prolongation of the war in South Africa upon the situation in India—Sir E. Collen's demands for expenditure upon the army—the heavy load of the Viceroy's responsibilities—defects of the Legislative machinery—the Mines Bill—other measures withdrawn—the Budget of 1900—the cost of famine—military expenditure not to be reduced—death of Sir William Lockhart—Sir Power Palmer appointed temporarily—the Viceroy suggests Lord Kitchener—the Commander-in-Chief *versus* the Military Member—anomalies of the system of Military Administration—Sir Power Palmer's appointment confirmed for two years . . . pp. 98-111

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

Programme of the spring tour—a punitive expedition across the frontier of Assam—the character of Assam—Lord Curzon's criticism of the Mishmi expedition—the Viceroy no jingo—discomforts of travel in the plains in April—Lord Morley makes allowance for the climate—Lord Curzon works on in spite of it—the result—his criticisms of men—Quetta—the Nushki trade route—plain speaking to the people of the frontier—comment on the speech—Dera Ghazi Khan and Bannu—frontier problems discussed—an important decision . . . pp. 112-121

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER VIII

#### A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

Opportunities of work in England suggested—Lord Curzon unwilling to leave India—unwelcome interruptions—the China expedition—threat of a second famine—words of encouragement—a Russian move in the direction of Afghanistan—Lord Curzon's opinion asked—a divergence of view but agreement on the specific point at issue—military commissions for Indians—the Queen's interest—an Imperial Cadet Corps—King Edward's approval—ill-health—a delayed monsoon—the Viceroy's visit to the threatened areas—a lucky coincidence—the journey put to good use—Lord Curzon's Minute on the administration of the North West frontier drafted—a notable example of Lord Curzon's skill—his proposals accepted by the Cabinet—and approved by the public—a North West Frontier Province inaugurated—Lord Curzon's relations with Sir Mackworth Young—an acid correspondence—Mr. Fanshaw's action—an unfortunate speech—Lord Curzon worried. pp. 122-140

### CHAPTER IX

#### THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

A short holiday in the hills—further symptoms of strain—work of the Simla Session of the Legislative Council—the General Election in England—Lord and Lady Curzon leave Simla—nature of the tour—the gates of Somnath—Buddhist and Jain places of pilgrimage—Lord Curzon and modern Vandals—the Falls of Gersoppa—Dravidian architecture—the Kolar goldfields—addresses and speeches—the discomfort of the climate—the maneless lion of Kathiawar—Lord Curzon asks for a Director General of Archaeology—Lord Curzon makes his personality felt—an enthusiastic welcome in Bombay—a great speech—"impartial justice" Lord Curzon's watchword—the value of public opinion recognised—effect produced by the speech—different interpretations of "public opinion"—Lord Curzon's attitude towards the Indian National Congress—high praise from many quarters—Lord Curzon's absorption in administrative matters does not blind him to the more subtle effects of the contact between East and West.

pp. 141-154

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER X

#### THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

The death of Queen Victoria—effect in India—Lord Curzon's plans for commemorating her reign—his astonishment at the absence of monuments in India commemorating great and moving episodes in British-Indian history—his determination to re-erect the Holwell obelisk—the genesis of his proposal to build a great memorial hall—the difficulties he encountered—an architect chosen—Sir William Emerson's beautiful design—the huge cost of the undertaking—the building opened by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales . pp. 155-162

### CHAPTER XI

#### A SOLITARY SUMMER

Lord Curzon's review of two years work—progress made with the twelve reforms—the frontier—leave rules—the machinery of Government overhauled—currency reform—railways—irrigation—peasant indebtedness—the preservation of ancient monuments—educational reform—police reform—the reception accorded to the speech by the press—Lady Curzon's departure—plans for a tiger shoot—a record bag of snipe—Lord Curzon as a shot with a gun—and with a rifle—a bag of twelve tigers—discomfort of life in camp in April—the void caused by Lady Curzon's absence—all the world a stage—impressions of the Viceroy's work in England—Lord Curzon's championship of St. John Brodrick—the political situation in England—Lord Curzon's moods—and Lady Curzon's distress at separation . . . . . pp. 163-177

### CHAPTER XII

#### HERCULEAN LABOURS : LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

Lord Curzon's industry—his unwillingness to delegate work to others—his opinion of Sir Walter Lawrence—Lord Curzon's famous Resolution on Land policy—the reception accorded to it—a truly remarkable achievement—Lord Curzon considers the results of seventy years of effort at imparting a European education to an Asiatic people—his diagnosis of the partial failure of the experiment—too little elementary education—technical education, its

## CONTENTS

possibilities and its limitations—his scathing denunciation of the university system—how Fellowships were filled in India—a Directorship General of Education urged—an Educational Conference summoned—the strain imposed upon the Viceroy as chairman—his amazing performance—a Director General of Education appointed—the Universities Commission of 1902—legislation based on the Report of the Commission—Indian opposition—a hurricane agitation—the Bill passed—disappointing results. pp. 178-194

### CHAPTER XIII

#### MANIPUR AND BURMA

A temporary breakdown in health—death of the Amir of Afghanistan—peace or war?—reassuring news—a peaceful succession—the road to Manipur—arrival at Imphal—a shocking episode—its aftermath—Burma—a fascinating land—an ancient and attractive civilisation—old buildings restored and modern vandals rebuked—vast railway projects—Lord Curzon's sarcasm—a bubble pricked.

pp. 195-203

### CHAPTER XIV

#### SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

Trouble on the Tibetan frontier—Lord Curzon's efforts to effect a settlement by diplomacy—their failure—the fundamental difference between Lord Curzon and the Cabinet—illustrated in the case of Persia—and of Tibet—the beginning of friction with the Amir of Afghanistan—a quiet fortnight in Darjeeling—a tour in northern Bengal—an improving situation and a favourable Budget—relief to those in need but no general reduction of taxation—a visit to Hyderabad—a tiger tragedy—the Caves of Ajanta—progress with the work of restoration at Agra—a Director General of Archaeology appointed—the North West Frontier again—a spectacular Durbar—the Viceroy's opinion of Colonel Deane . . . pp. 204-213

### CHAPTER XV

#### THE QUESTION OF BERAR

Relations with the Nizam—the history of the question of Berar—the juridical position created by the Treaty of 1853—the Nizam's dislike of it—Lord Curzon's proposals for dealing with it—an

## CONTENTS

initial rebuff—followed by a surprising success—receipt of the news in England—general satisfaction—a reordering of other Provincial boundaries suggested . . . . pp. 214-220

### CHAPTER XVI

#### THE GREAT DURBAR

Plans for the summer of 1902—the genesis of the idea of holding a great Durbar—the King's approval—criticism from other quarters—Lord Curzon wishes to announce a remission of taxation—objections raised in England—an acute conflict—contemporary descriptions of the Durbar—little generally known of the work of preparation—the story told—the vast scale on which the ceremony was planned—an Indian Arts Exhibition—the plan of a vast auditorium—use to be made of the Moghul buildings at Delhi—Lord Curzon's comments on Lord Lytton's programme for the Imperial Assemblage of 1877—he visits the site of the ceremony—and gives orders on points of detail—accusations of extravagance—his indignation—and his defence . . . . pp. 221-234

### CHAPTER XVII

#### GRAVE ISSUES

The burden of a highly strung nature—differences with the India Council—an unpleasant shock—the bitterness of disillusionment—the Secretary of State's dismay—Lord Curzon frames his indictment—the Aden boundary delimitation as an example—trouble over the question of liability for the cost of the Indian representatives at the Coronation in London—sharp words—the withdrawal of a Despatch demanded—Lord Curzon refuses—a further source of conflict—a threat of resignation?—a bridge discovered—a change of mood—fresh worries in India—collisions between British soldiers and natives of the country—a committee on shooting pass rules—the 9th Lancers case—Lord Curzon's action—the regiment cheered at Delhi—Lord Curzon's account of the episode—the ultimate effect of Lord Curzon's crusade—the departure of Sir Power Palmer—apprehensions caused in military circles in India by the rumour of Lord Kitchener's appointment—Lord Kitchener arrives—and creates a good impression . . . pp. 235-251

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### POMP AND PAGEANTRY

The impression created upon spectators by the Delhi Durbar—Nicholson's orderly—the whole conception an expression of Lord Curzon's personality—his organising ability—and his love of resurrecting the past—his celebration of the centenary of Government House, Calcutta—the Ball of 1803 and that of 1903—Lord Curzon's love of old Calcutta—and his determination to improve and beautify the modern city—the smoke nuisance dealt with—the Imperial Library founded—Hastings House bought and restored—Lord Curzon's resentment at the removal of the Capital from Calcutta to Delhi . . . . . pp. 252-260

### CHAPTER XIX

#### DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

The increasing importance of foreign affairs—the postscript to a Prime Minister's letter—the Amir's attitude towards Lord Curzon—his letter of welcome—his complaints against the Government's agents in Afghanistan—Lord Curzon nettled—he demands closer co-operation between the Government of India and the Amir for purposes of defence—the Amir rejects his overtures—he urges a more definite policy upon the Cabinet—the Cabinet disturbed—the tension relieved by the receipt of a letter from Habibulla—Lord Selborne explains the Cabinet's point of view—the Amir, the Viceroy and the Cabinet refuse to recede from their respective positions—a deadlock ensues . . . . . pp. 261-271

### CHAPTER XX

#### DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

The Russian menace behind the Tibetan trouble—Lord Curzon's plans for dealing with it—his case a particularly strong one—a crucial test as between the Viceroy and the Cabinet—and a fundamental disagreement—yet Lord Curzon contemplates not merely remaining at his post but suggesting an extension of his term of office—pour parlers with Russia—a Conference at Khamba Jong

## CONTENTS

suggested—Lord Curzon wishes to widen, and the Cabinet to restrict, the scope of the negotiations—Tibetan refusal to negotiate—an advance to Gyantze reluctantly sanctioned. pp. 272-280

### CHAPTER XXI

#### MORE GRAVE ISSUES

The end of the Legislative Session—Lord Curzon's predicament—a great speech—vindication of the Durbar—a touch of cynicism—uncertainty as to Lord Curzon's future—correspondence with Lord Selborne on differences with the Cabinet—additional charges in respect of the army made upon Indian revenues—Lord Curzon's irritation—a plan for making additional forces available for service in India in the event of an emergency—rejected by Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener—Lord Curzon's differences with his friends in England . . . . . pp. 281-289

### CHAPTER XXII

#### A GREAT REFORMER

Programme of work drawn up for the Simla season of 1903—a State Paper on Education—Lord Curzon's solicitude for the agricultural masses—the Punjab Land Alienation Act—Co-operative Credit Societies established—growth of the movement—an Imperial Agricultural Department created—the Agricultural Institute at Pusa founded—Mr. Phipps's princely gift—his testimony to Lord Curzon's services to the Indian peasantry—Lord Curzon lays the foundation stone of the Institute—concrete examples of the value of agricultural research—a Commission on irrigation—Lord Curzon tells the public what can and what cannot be done by the irrigation engineer—works undertaken during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty—Mr. Robertson's report on railways in India—the achievements of the past—Lord Curzon's proposals for the future—a Railway Board created—and a new Department of Commerce and Industry—Lord Curzon's claim on behalf of his Government—an extension of his term of office announced—the reception accorded to the announcement . . . . . pp. 290-304

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER XXIII

#### THE PERSIAN QUESTION

Lord Curzon anxious for a definite programme—the impending visit of the Shah to England—the Garter withheld in London and given in Tehran—Lord Curzon's doubts as to the efficacy of such measures—his policy a frank and simple one—no intruders to be allowed in the Persian Gulf or in Southern Persia—the strategical importance of Sistan—the Nushki-Sistan trade route—French activity in Persian waters—and Russian interest—the Kapnist concession—other indications of a Russian forward policy—Turkey takes an interest in Koweit—Lord Curzon's counter measures—and his representations to the Cabinet—Lord Lansdowne moves—Lord Curzon's satisfaction—Russian assurances—Lord Curzon proposes a cruise in the Persian Gulf—the Cabinet agree—Persian susceptibilities aroused—success of the cruise—Lord Curzon's declaration—humorous interludes—landing at Bahrein—the entry into Koweit—the position at Koweit—the action of the Sheikh—end of the cruise . . . . . pp. 305-319

### CHAPTER XXIV

#### THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

Lady Curzon sails for England—the pangs of separation—Bengal too large a charge—departmentalism—an example—the beginning of the storm—the Bain case—Lord Curzon visits Eastern Bengal—the impressions derived from the visit—Lord Curzon objects to Council Government—his speeches in Eastern Bengal—he believes opposition to have been disarmed—yet sentiment and not reason was the driving force behind the agitation—and his speeches fell on deaf ears—Lord Curzon as an exponent of public opinion—the apparent inconsistency of his attitude explained—the magnitude in the change in the outlook of the Indian educated classes—the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam comes into being.

pp. 320-329

### CHAPTER XXV

#### ANCIENT MONUMENTS

The Ancient Monuments Preservation Bill—tributes to Lord Curzon's Work—he accepts on behalf of Government the responsi-

## CONTENTS

bility of preserving and restoring ancient buildings—his work at Agra—his search for a lamp worthy of the Taj—a lamp made in Egypt—its installation by Sir John Hewett—other buildings in the Indo-Saracenic style—a failure—Lord Curzon's indignation—the Buddhist shrine at Bodh-Gaya—intruders ejected from buildings of antiquarian interest all over India—arts and crafts—the exhibition at Delhi . . . . . pp. 330-339

### CHAPTER XXVI

#### THE SUMMER OF 1904

Lord Curzon sails for England—Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports—Lady Curzon's enthusiasm—the castle at Walmer not ready for occupation—functions and speeches—Lady Curzon's illness—Lord Curzon's consequent dislike of Walmer—his resignation of the Lord Wardenship tendered—expectations that Lord Curzon's visit to England would result in an improvement in the relations between him and the authorities in London, disappointed—his relations with St. John Brodrick—the progress of events in Tibet—Colonel Younghusband obliged to employ force—his advance to Lhasa sanctioned—he signs a Convention—the Cabinet's displeasure—Afghanistan again to the fore—the Cabinet disagree with Lord Ampthill's Government and with Lord Kitchener—Lord Curzon called in—the result . . . . . pp. 340-348

### CHAPTER XXVII

#### RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

A meeting of the Imperial Defence Committee—a move by Lord Kitchener—his rough and ready methods—his dislike of the system of Military Administration in India—the system explained—Lord Kitchener restive—his temperament—Lord Curzon's determination to work amicably with him—friction between Lord Kitchener and General Sir Edmund Elles—Lord Kitchener's ignorance of Indian Conditions—the situation improves—measures on which Lord Kitchener and Lord Curzon were in agreement—Lord Kitchener in disagreement with Lord Ampthill's Government—he threatens resignation—Lord Curzon consulted—his inability to

## CONTENTS

accept Lord Kitchener's demand for the abolition of the Military Member—it becomes clear that a serious controversy lies ahead in the event of his return to India—yet his return agreed to by the Government—Lady Curzon grievously ill—her forebodings—Lord Curzon sails alone . . . . pp. 349-360

### CHAPTER XXVIII

#### RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

A great reception—Lady Curzon's recovery and return to India—Lord Curzon's position with different classes of the people—an injudicious speech—the storm that it raised—the Afghan difficulty comes to a head—Lord Curzon's representations to the Cabinet—rejected by the latter body—a Treaty signed—Lord Curzon's disgust—a wedge driven into friendship—a prosperity Budget—further reduction of taxation—military expenditure defended by Lord Curzon—a costly scheme of reorganisation—the system of Military Administration blamed—such criticism due to an imperfect understanding of the facts—Lord Curzon's earlier efforts to grapple with the military problem—the genesis of Lord Kitchener's scheme—the beginning of the storm . . . . pp. 361-372

### CHAPTER XXIX

#### THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

The Despatch of December the 2nd, 1904—Lord Kitchener's criticisms of the existing system and his proposals—Sir Edmund Elles's reply—Lord Curzon's Minute—unable to accept either Lord Kitchener's description of the system or his proposals for abolishing it—scene in the Council Chamber on March the 10th—Lord Kitchener in debate—an extraordinary plagiarism—Lord Kitchener's silence—Sir Edmund Elles asks for a verdict—a verdict given—the Government of India's Despatch of March the 23rd—Lord Kitchener's Minute of Dissent—Lord Ripon's astonishment—Mr. Brodrick convenes a Committee—the Despatch of May the 31st—the scheme embodied in it a compromise—the nature of the compromise—the views of Lord Roberts and Lord Lansdowne—modifications of the scheme submitted to the Cabinet by Lord Curzon

## CONTENTS

and Lord Kitchener jointly—the Prime Minister surprised—Lord Curzon surprised—at cross purposes—Lord Curzon resigns—a Military Supply Member is created—and abolished—surprise at Lord Curzon's resignation—sympathy with him in India—remarkable tributes—Lord Curzon sails . . . . pp. 373-390

### CHAPTER XXX

#### THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

The controversy in retrospect—the light thrown by subsequent events upon the validity of the opinions of the two schools of thought—verdict of Lord Esher's Committee—and of the Mesopotamian Commission—the personality of the protagonists in the drama of 1905—the Viceroy—the Commander-in-Chief—the Secretary of State—the Prime Minister—the episode of the Dogger Bank—the Cabinet's dread of Lord Kitchener's resignation—Lord Kitchener's threats of resignation—the Secretary of State's anxiety—attacks on the Government of India—an official denial—Lord Kitchener's unorthodox methods—the opinions of the Lieutenant Generals sought by him—and withheld from the Viceroy—they become known in England—Lord Curzon's bitterness—his efforts to keep the personal element out of the controversy—friction between him and the Secretary of State—his ill health—unfortunate impression created by the Secretary of State's Despatch—Lord Curzon's resentment—he addresses the Legislative Council—his speech criticised in the House of Commons—another unfortunate episode—charges against the Viceroy based on a lack of knowledge of the facts—was Lord Curzon an ill-used man?—should he have been permitted to return to India?—why he was willing to do so—King Edward's advice—respected by Lord Curzon—honour to whom honour is due . . . . pp. 391-412

### CHAPTER XXXI

#### RETROSPECT

Lord Curzon's energy—his vivid personality—his insistence on the proper observance of official etiquette—his direct personal control of the administrative machine—his relations with his colleagues and

## CONTENTS

subordinates—friction with Governors of the Presidencies—the greatness of his Viceroyalty—the thoroughness and soundness of his methods—Lord Morley's tribute—Lord Curzon's belief in the Mission of Great Britain in India—his fervent faith—his solicitude for the patient, inarticulate masses of the population—his conception of the relations between himself and the Indian peoples—an Indian Nationalist's understanding of his point of view—Lord Curzon's high ideals—righteousness and justice the foundation of British rule—his sensitiveness to praise and blame—his ability nevertheless to steer a straight course ignoring both—his moral courage—a great and moving farewell . . . pp. 413-424

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**PLATE**

I <i>The Old and the Young Self</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	Facing page
II <i>Government House, Calcutta</i>	23
III <i>The Taj Mahal as restored by Lord Curzon</i>	95
IV <i>The Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta</i>	161
V <i>One of Lord Curzon's tigers</i>	167
VI <i>Lord Curzon, 1902</i>	205
VII <i>The Viceroy and Lady Curzon ride in State to Delhi</i>	225
VIII <i>Statue of Lord Curzon in Calcutta</i> <i>by H. THORNYCROFT, R.A.</i>	259
IX <i>Durbar on board H.M.S. Argonaut at Shargah</i>	315
X <i>Lord Curzon opening the Arts Exhibition at Delhi</i>	339
XI <i>Lady Curzon in the famous peacock dress</i>	359
XII <i>Statue of Lord Curzon in Calcutta</i> <i>by F. W. POMEROY, R.A.</i>	413



# THE LIFE OF LORD CURZON

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

JANUARY—APRIL 1899

IN India Lord Curzon's appointment to the Viceroyalty had met with an almost universally favourable reception. Qualms which had been felt in Indian political circles on the score of his avowed Imperialism had been quieted by the sympathetic references which his farewell speeches in England had contained to the feelings and prejudices of the Indian peoples. The Committee of the Indian National Congress, then sitting in Madras, which had been critical of the rumoured appointment before it had been officially announced, telegraphed a message of welcome, noting with gratitude his expressed sympathy with the people of India, and trusting that a policy of progress and confidence in them would be followed throughout his term of office. And when on December the 30th, 1898, Lord and Lady Curzon landed at Bombay, they were warmly welcomed by all classes of the population.

The councillors of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, which was the first body to present an Address of welcome, rejoiced that they were able to convey to him "the keen and intense gratification with which all classes of the people" had read his declaration that in the discharge of the great trust reposed in him he would regard it as his duty to remember the differences of race, of clime and of creed which separated the majority of the Indian peoples from his own, and that it was only by regard, consequently, for their feelings, by respect for their prejudices, by deference even to

## CURZON, 1899

their scruples, that he could hope to succeed in the task which lay before him. And if Indian opinion was gratified by the consideration shown to it, European society equally welcomed the ability and industry which he promised to bring to bear upon the many problems which were about to claim his attention, and the high conception of his duties which his recent utterances had displayed.

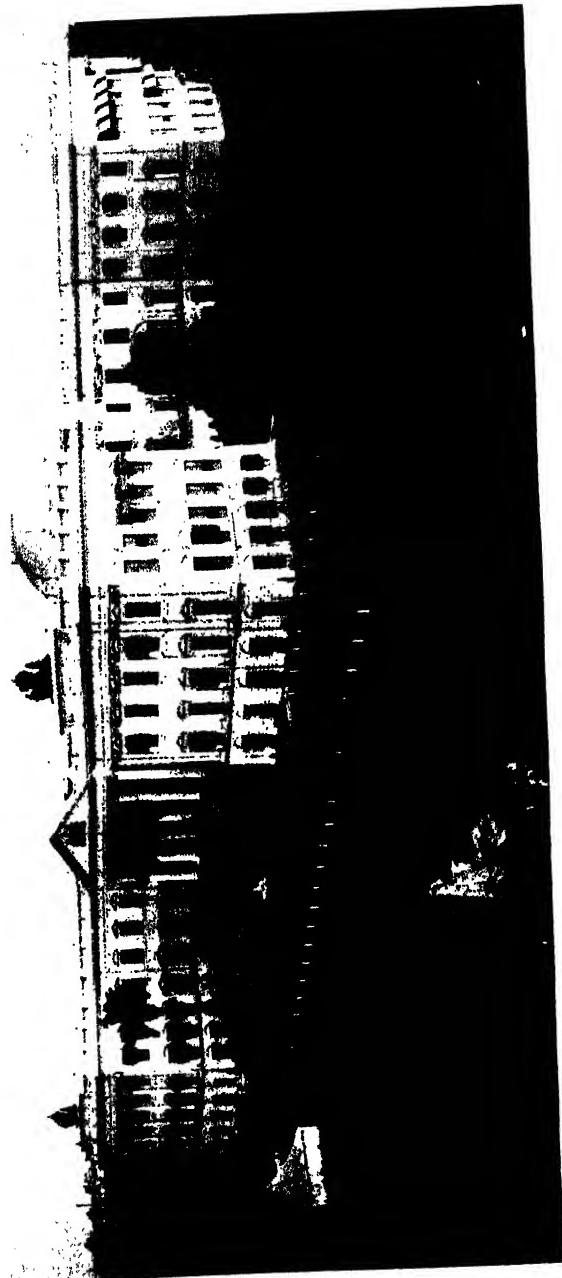
The eager expectations which had been aroused were amply satisfied by the manner and matter of the replies which he made to the many complimentary Addresses which he received from a variety of interests, both Indian and European, during the opening days of his term of office. His declaration in the course of the first speech which he delivered on Indian soil, that it would be his ambition "to hold the scales even" between the manifold nationalities and interests of the land—the British, few in number and scattered far and wide under a trying climate in a foreign land, and the many races and beliefs, so composite and yet so divergent, of the indigenous population, was widely quoted and favourably commented on. In the view of the leading European paper of Bombay this was the most satisfactory feature of an admirable speech. "Sympathy with the native races of Asia, has, indeed, been one of the most striking characteristics of Lord Curzon's life, and if his writings and speeches may be taken to afford a clue to his policy, sympathetic administration will be the keynote of his rule."<sup>1</sup> A few days later in Calcutta he re-affirmed the primacy of place which India occupied in his affections. "Great in my eyes as were the fascinations of Parliamentary life at home, it was in no spirit of self-denial . . . that I surrendered my seat in the House of Commons, in order to devote the best years of my life to the task which had for long been its favourite pre-occupation."<sup>2</sup>

He had every reason to be satisfied with the first impression which he had created. Lord Sandhurst, who had found opportunities of making enquiries from experienced persons, was able to write within a day or two of his departure for Calcutta that the first impressions created were *very* good, while Lady Curzon's

<sup>1</sup>*Times of India*, December 31st, 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Reply to an Address from the Municipal Corporation of Calcutta, January 11th, 1899.





GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CALCUTTA: THE NORTH FRONT

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

gracious charm had enchanted all. "I assure you I do not think any couple could have had a better start on their arduous career."<sup>1</sup> In England it was noted with satisfaction that in his replies to the Addresses which he had received he had shown admirable restraint. "There have been Indian Viceroys who, on entering office, promised more than they were ever able to perform; others have inadvertently displayed the outlines of some new policy, with the result of setting fire to inflammatory elements of controversy. Lord Curzon deserves credit, then, for reserving judgment until closer personal acquaintance with Indian requirements adds to the information previously acquired during his visits to the East."<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon himself expressed his satisfaction at his reception at the end of his first letter to the Secretary of State—"I have written on one or two other matters to Godley, and will add nothing more here except that the reception we receive everywhere is one of extraordinary friendliness and even enthusiasm, that the climate is superb, and that we both of us start by enjoying the life and the work."<sup>3</sup>

The widespread interest which his appointment had aroused was reflected in the vast concourse of people that thronged the streets of Calcutta to witness his state entry into the Capital. Punctually at 4.50, on the afternoon of January the 3rd, the state carriage containing the incoming Viceroy and Lady Curzon drew up at the foot of the great stairway of Government House—that house built on the model of his own home in Derbyshire, through whose doors he had passed twelve years before, vowing that the day should come when he would return to it, not as a guest, but as the rightful and duly installed occupant of its historic chambers.

It is easy to imagine the feelings of pride and satisfied romance which must have swept over him as he set foot on the broad sweep of steps leading up to the great pillared hall beyond. He was the central figure in a dazzling display of that pageantry which appealed so irresistibly to him as the essential accompaniment of all great public events framed in an Eastern setting. All round

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lord Sandhurst, Governor of Bombay, to W. R. Lawrence, C.I.E., January 2nd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>The *Globe*, of December 31st, 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 12th, 1899.

in the gaily bedecked streets and the open spaces of Dalhousie Square, through which he had driven between lines of troops, were massed the interested inmates of a great oriental city. Conspicuous among the troops drawn up within the enclosure of Government House were the statuesque, scarlet-clad figures of the Viceroy's mounted bodyguard which had escorted him through the city. The great white stairway itself glittered with the uniforms of naval and military officers headed by their respective chiefs, and among those who crowded its steps were judges of the High Court with the Chief Justice at their head, civil officials and members of the Government, consular officers and representatives of foreign Governments, and dignitaries of the Church, all mingling with a distinguished galaxy of Indian Princes and noblemen. At the foot of the stairway was the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to welcome him as he stepped from the great state carriage; at the top the outgoing Viceroy and his staff; while at his side stood the lady whose grace and charm had already won all hearts and for whose sake, above all, he desired to be the cynosure of all men's eyes. As the boom of thirty-one guns reverberated over the city he ascended the steps, and, after the formal presentations which etiquette demanded, passed from view into the cool depths of the building which for the next five years and more was to be the scene of so much devoted labour, such brilliant triumphs and, finally, of so bitter and consuming a despair. Well may the thoughts which twenty-five years later he committed to print have flashed through his mind as he passed up the steps. As "each new Governor-General ascended the steps to the assumption of his great office"—such was the picture he saw in retrospect—"all was novelty, brave hopes and high aspirations." May he not, too, have had some fleeting prescience of that bitterness of soul which caused him to add as a sombre postscript to the picture which he had penned—"Down them a few years later he walked with feelings very often how different, into the cold dissecting chamber of history?"<sup>1</sup>

If any such possibility did, indeed, flash across his mind, it was quickly banished by the absorbing interest of the present. December

<sup>1</sup>"British Government in India," Vol. I, ch. 5.

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

and January are *par excellence* the months during which society in Calcutta gives itself up to the pleasures of entertaining and being entertained, and the demands upon a new Viceroy who had to become acquainted with, and make himself known to, a wide circle of official and non-official society, were proportionately increased. Lord Curzon has told us that he had a calculation made for him which showed that in the month of January the number of meals served to visitors, guests or residents in Government House was three thousand five hundred.<sup>1</sup> When some years later the Government of India left Calcutta for Delhi, it fell to the Governor of Bengal to wear, as proudly as circumstances would permit, the mantle which had fallen upon him from broader shoulders, and the extent of the entertainments at Government House at that season of the year is indicated by the consumption of champagne within its walls which, during the month of December 1921, amounted to one thousand one hundred and fifteen bottles. But besides luncheons and dinners there were other social functions to be crowded into the opening days of the new reign—a Levee and Drawing-room dances, and a great State Ball, to which the whole of Calcutta society flocked. On the night of this brilliant function you could hardly see the ball-room for the people, wrote one who was present; and he added, if politically it was too early to forecast the new reign, “socially and personally it is already an assured triumph.”<sup>2</sup> The Viceroy himself, writing to Sir A. Godley on the 26th of January, mentioned the social demands made on him. “It is three weeks since I assumed office to-morrow. Within that time we have had Levee, Drawing-room, State Ball, State Evening Party, three big dinners of sixty, and four or more of 20-30, so we have not been idle.”

There awaited him in the administrative field a mass of work which might well have appalled a less rapacious worker. “All the papers at home and here congratulate me on taking the helm at a comparatively easy and untroubled time. They do not know, what I find upon examination, that almost every one of the bigger questions which occupied the attention of my predecessor has been

<sup>1</sup>“British Government in India,” Vol. I, ch. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. G. W. Steevens, in the *Daily Mail*, February 17th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

left over for me to solve.”<sup>1</sup> And the time not given over to entertaining and to other public functions was spent in the great room with its big verandah in the south-west wing of Lord Wellesley’s stately palace, in which the long line of Governors-General from his day onwards had lived and laboured—the historic room which had witnessed “discussions as agitated and decisions as heavily charged with fate as any private apartment in the wide circumference of the British Empire.”<sup>2</sup> Here “from 10 a.m., with the exception of an hour or two for meals, or a public function or a private drive, until 2 a.m. on the following morning or sometimes later”<sup>3</sup> Lord Curzon sat, pondering his policy on all the diverse problems of Indian government, and wrestling feverishly with those ponderous files whose wordy voluminousness so exasperated him, impelling him to unburden himself in dithyrambs of mordant condemnation. As he probed steadily into the formidable series of problems which claimed his attention, from questions of high policy, such as the safeguarding of the Indian Empire from foreign aggression and currency reform, to important domestic questions, such as educational reform or the improvement of agriculture and the development of irrigation on a grand scale, he railed impatiently at the obstacles which blocked the way to quick decisions, still more to prompt and effective action. “The system of working here is so radically vicious that a stage arises at which a question gets tied up in a tangle of manuscript and print in which the real issues are utterly obscured and from which no one seems able to extricate it.”<sup>4</sup>

Among the many first-class questions which he found urgently demanding solution was the case of the Khyber, a branch of the larger question of frontier administration. “I have spent seven hours on the Khyber papers only, and am not much nearer the end.” At which point the vials of his wrath are unsealed and poured forth in a torrent of withering sarcasm.

“Your Despatch of August the 5th arrives. It goes to the Foreign Department. Thereupon clerk No. 1 paraphrases

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, afterwards Lord Kilbracken, January 26th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>“British Government in India,” Vol. I, ch. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 26th, 1899.

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

and comments upon it over 41 folio pages of print of his own composition, dealing solely with the Khyber suggestions in it. Then comes clerk No. 2 with 21 more pages upon clerk No. 1. Then we get to the region of Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, and Secretaries. All these gentlemen state their worthless views at equal length. Finally we get to the top of the scale, and we find the Viceroy and the Military Member, with a proper regard for their dignity, expanding themselves over a proportionate space of print. Then these papers wander about from Department to Department, and amid the various Members of Council. Each has his say, and the result is a sort of literary Bedlam. I am grappling with this vile system in my own Department, but it has seated itself like the Old Man of the Sea upon the shoulders of the Indian Government, and every man accepts, while deplored, the burden.”<sup>1</sup>

At the end of three months’ effort to make an impression upon “this vile system,” he records his progress in a letter to Mrs. Craigie, better known to the world as John Oliver Hobbes—“Government here . . . has become very ponderous and slow. I am prodding up the animal with most vigorous and unexpected digs, and it gambols plaintively under the novel spur. Nothing has been done hitherto under six months. When I suggest six weeks, the attitude is one of pained surprise ; if six days, one of pathetic protest ; if six hours, one of stupefied resignation.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, he found it possible within three months of his assumption of office to outline for himself a sufficiently formidable programme of reform ; and by the end of March he was already talking definitely of “twelve important questions . . . to which, as soon as I have the time, I propose to address myself.” Curiosity was naturally aroused, but the time for satisfying it had not yet come. “What these questions are I do not propose to relieve the curiosity of Hon. Members by now informing them.”<sup>3</sup> They covered a sufficiently wide field and give an indication of the comprehensive

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, January 26th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated April 17th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Speech when bringing Legislative Council to a close, March 27th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

grip which the new Viceroy was taking of the whole extent of the interests which came within his purview. They ranged from reform of the educational system to a radical alteration in the departmental methods of transacting business ; from the thorough overhauling of the Archaeological Department to the institution of an Imperial Library in Calcutta ; from a project for the employment of young Indians of good family in the army to a revision of the Civil Service leave rules, under which the continuity of administration seemed to him to be rapidly breaking down ; and from the Punjab frontier to the construction of a railway to Sistan—that railway which ten years earlier he had declared to be “the least aggressive, the cheapest and the most profitable means” of counteracting the menace to India of Russian policy in Persia.<sup>1</sup> From the stir which his activities in these different fields of administration caused he derived a certain measure of amused satisfaction. “Mary is adored by everyone here, and I am regarded with mingled bewilderment and pain.”<sup>2</sup>

The greater number of questions which he had in mind when delivering his speech to the Legislative Council were to receive his attention as soon as time permitted. He looked forward to grappling with them during the coming summer in the comparative quiet of Simla. In the meantime there were urgent matters calling for instant attention. In an Address of welcome presented to him by the Municipal Corporation of Calcutta shortly after his arrival reference was made to a Bill for reconstructing the governing body of the city, involving “wide and far-reaching changes and a system differing from the lines of municipal self-government which have been followed in Calcutta during the last quarter of a century.” Not many days had passed before he was looking seriously into this matter.

From the first he disliked the Bill which was before the Bengal Legislative Council. It seemed to him to have been drafted “partly in panic and partly in anger.” It had, however, been introduced by a former Lieutenant-Governor of the Province, had been accepted by Sir John Woodburn, the present Lieutenant-Governor, endorsed by the Government of India, sanctioned by the Secretary of State and stoutly defended in scores of official speeches. Yet the

<sup>1</sup>See Vol. I, page 299.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Mrs. Craigie, April 17th, 1899.

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

more he saw of it the less he liked it. The old Corporation had been condemned for inefficiency. The Bill which had been drawn up, while purporting to retain the Indian complexion of the governing body, sought to transfer actual control over the affairs of the city to an Executive Committee largely British in character and composition. The device seemed to him to be a clumsy and mischievous form of dualism, a jejune attempt to constitute an *imperium in imperio* wholly illogical in principle and doomed to failure in practice. And before the end of March he had definitely decided that he could not give his sanction to any such measure. He was assisted to this conclusion by the growing volume of opinion hostile to the Bill. Indian politicians clamoured loudly against the measure on the platform and in the press ; English opinion, which had originally been inclined to support it, became critical ; the confidence even of its promoters was gradually being shaken, while the official who, as Chairman of the existing body, had ample first-hand experience on which to base his conclusions, drew up a private indictment of the measure "which, if it ever became public, would blow the Bill out of the water in a day."<sup>1</sup>

It was finally decided that at the conclusion of its consideration by the Bengal Legislative Council that body should adjourn till July, that the Bill should be submitted by the Viceroy to the Secretary of State with an indication of his objections to it and various proposals for meeting them, together with a request for the latter's opinion regarding the whole matter.

The consideration of this difficult and delicate subject had made very large demands upon the Viceroy's time. Not only had he spent many hours discussing the Bill itself with Sir John Woodburn, but he had devoted a great deal of thought to possible alternatives. And before leaving Calcutta he had outlined a scheme based upon certain broad principles, including a reduction of the existing Corporation to more manageable proportions ; the creation of a body which would both provide opportunities for such Indians as took a genuine interest in municipal affairs, and, by giving a British element a position which would not leave it wholly at the mercy of an Indian majority, would induce Englishmen to come

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, March 16th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

forward and serve on it, and, lastly, provision for a logical and proportionate relation between the Corporation and its various Committees, upon which the bulk of the work would devolve. This sketch, he thought, might supply the basis for a very useful Bill to be introduced later in the year. He had every reason for regarding the time given to the matter as well spent. The passage of a Bill of which he disapproved had been obviated ; time for the consideration of a more suitable measure had been gained, and the temporary elimination of a troublesome question from his daily programme of work made room for other important and, possibly, not less interesting subjects.

Amongst these was a matter on which he determined to legislate before the close of the Session at the end of March. In a country in which more than seventy per cent. of the population depend upon agriculture in one form or another for their livelihood anything adversely affecting crop production is a serious matter ; and for some little time past the producers of Indian sugar had been feeling the competition of bounty-fed sugar from continental Europe. The nineteenth century had, indeed, witnessed a remarkable alteration in the balance of trade in this commodity. At the beginning of the century India had been an exporting country ; by the end of it she had become an importer and was drawing her supplies from the very countries which had formerly been her best customers. There was a saying amongst the peasants of the United Provinces, where sugar cultivation was carried on over extensive tracts of country, that sugar cane was to other tillage as the elephant to other beasts ; and the grower and the refiner were finding it increasingly difficult to compete successfully with the bounty-fed product of the European beet growers, the imports of which had increased from 12,000 cwt. ten years before to more than 1,000,000 cwt. in 1896-97.

Representations on the subject by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, supported by the Chambers of Madras and Upper India, had been submitted to Lord Elgin's Government and had formed the subject of anxious correspondence with the Secretary of State. No one was optimistic enough to suppose that the bounty-giving countries would voluntarily agree to abolish the bounties, and it was generally held in India that the imposition of countervailing duties

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

was the only practical alternative. A Conference of the countries interested in the matter was to be held at Brussels during the summer of 1898, and when pressing for representation thereat the Madras Chamber of Commerce had written—"Countervailing duties are India's only weapon of defence, and if her representative at the Conference is not allowed to use it, he will appear there as a mere supplicant for favour or pity—a rôle which is, as it seems to this Chamber, neither dignified nor calculated to facilitate an attainment of the object in view."

The argument was difficult to resist ; but the traditional economic orthodoxy of Great Britain coloured the outlook of Lord Elgin's Government. While they admitted that the increased importation of sugar might have reduced the profits of the refineries in India, they were not prepared to admit that it was materially affecting the cultivator ; and in a Despatch dated May the 5th had declared that glad though they would be to see the bounties abolished, they would not be willing to impose countervailing duties if they were not. The Brussels Conference separated without achieving anything, and in August the Secretary of State had invited from the Government of India a further and fuller expression of their views on the question of countervailing duties. Such was the position when Lord Curzon took over charge from Lord Elgin, and he had not been in office many days before his Government received a further communication from the Secretary of State covering a memorial from a large number of planters in Mauritius, praying for the imposition of such duties to protect them in the Indian market, together with a sheaf of correspondence which made it clear that the Colonial secretary, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, heartily supported the petition.

Short though the time had been, Lord Curzon had already taken the matter up, and a Despatch from his Government crossed that from the Secretary of State. The views of the Government of India, as now set forth, showed a marked advance in favour of countervailing duties. Sir J. Westland, the Finance Member, had been a little fearful that India was wanted as a stalking horse "from behind whom the Home Government propose to slay an independent quarry";<sup>1</sup> but under the inspiration of the Viceroy the Govern-

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon to Sir A. Godley, February 23rd, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

North West Frontier," of whom he wrote many years later—" His native attendant remarked to one of my staff, as his master went away, that he left the presence of the Viceroy 'sweated and surprised.' "<sup>1</sup>

In his passion for efficiency and his horror of ineptitude, Lord Curzon's summing up of those who served under him did not always err on the side of charity. Of one high official he said—" He reminds me of the title of one of Anthony Hope's novels," though of which he was discreetly silent. Of another he wrote, "He is a pleasant man to meet and even to argue with ; but on paper he is somewhat of a gladiator"; and of a third, "He is hardly the Arthur to lead a round table of knights upon any very novel or venturesome quest." Of those who impressed him favourably he spoke in high terms, and in his judgments he was seldom at fault. "We have here in Calcutta a Judge of the High Court named Jenkins, who, in less than three years, has made a considerable reputation both for capacity on the bench and for general energy and popularity."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Justice Jenkins achieved the unique distinction of becoming Chief Justice of the High Court of Bombay ; of retiring on the pension attaching to that high judicial office ; of being caught up almost immediately into the Council of India in Whitehall ; of reverting to India as Chief Justice of the High Court of Calcutta, from which office he retired once more in 1915, as Sir Lawrence Jenkins, K.C.I.E., to become a Member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. It is a further tribute to his captivating personality that he was the subject of encomiums at the hands of Lord Minto and Lord Morley every whit as warm as those which he had drawn from Lord Curzon. "I really don't think I can spare Jenkins," wrote Lord Morley, in reply to a request from Lord Minto that he might be sent out to preside over the High Court of Calcutta. "He is one of the two or three most valuable men on my council"<sup>3</sup>; and later, when it had been decided, after all, that Sir Lawrence Jenkins should return to India—"He has been of immense value to me about reforms—and a more willing, ready and

<sup>1</sup>" British Government in India," Vol. I, page 119.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, dated February 23rd, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Lord Morley to Lord Minto, August 6th, 1908.

## EARLY DAYS IN INDIA

resourceful man in the legal and legislative line it has never been my fortune to meet. Besides that he has made a grand sacrifice of personal ease and domestic comfort in consenting to exchange his snug life here for a return to Calcutta, and only because he was told that you desired it, and that I thought it would be for the public good.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon was early on the look-out for those men of virile character upon whom rather than upon big battalions, as he had told the House of Commons a year before, he pinned his faith to render secure our position on the North West Frontier. He was to meet a number of frontier officers during his visit to Lahore on his way from Calcutta to Simla ; but already before leaving the capital he had been weighing in the balance men whose names had come before him in the course of his official correspondence. One such officer he found “ universally regarded as a bull in a china shop ” ; another was without “ the knowledge, and I did not find in him the quality or fibre that are essential.” With another, however, he was most favourably impressed from the first. His attention had been attracted by an admirably planned and skilfully executed raid against a recalcitrant section of frontier tribesmen, “ The most brilliant little feat performed on the frontier for many a day.”<sup>2</sup> The officer responsible was Captain G. Roos-Keppel, “ A most capable and reliable young frontier officer, quite of the old school.”<sup>3</sup> This early estimate was amply vindicated by the officer’s subsequent career, for when in 1919 Sir George Roos-Keppel, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., retired from service in India, he had filled with singular distinction the highest office which the frontier had to offer—that of Chief Commissioner of the North West Frontier Province—and left behind him a name which will rank high on the scroll on which are inscribed those names which have passed into the passionate history of these turbulent border-lands.

Before leaving for Lahore Lord Curzon had, indeed, not only made considerable progress with his examination of the problems of the North West Frontier, but had dealt forcefully with a crisis of international proportions, which had arisen beyond the immediate

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lord Morley to Lord Minto, March 12th, 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 9th, 1899. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

## CURZON, 1899

purlieus of the frontier. But these matters must be dealt with in a separate chapter. No wonder that on the eve of his departure from Calcutta he should have written to the Secretary of State, "It has been a very busy, and I hope, fruitful, three months. I think any one here would tell you that more has been put into that time than has, as a rule, been attempted before";<sup>1</sup> or that he should have offered up thanks, as he did in a letter to a friend, for "the help beyond measure" which he had derived from his previous knowledge of India.<sup>2</sup>

There was one small cloud in an otherwise serene sky. On February the 3rd an attempt—fortunately unsuccessful—was made on the life of a political officer in Poona, and five days later two Brahmin gentlemen, Messrs. G. S. and R. S. Dravid, who had given information to the police, leading to the conviction of the murderer of Mr. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst the summer before, were shot dead in the streets of the city. The terrorisation of witnesses and jurymen which in after years made it so difficult to obtain convictions in such cases in the ordinary courts had not yet developed, and on this occasion the act was followed by swift retribution, and the perpetrators of the crime, Vasudeo Chapekar, a brother of the man who had been executed for the assassination of Mr. Rand, and his accomplice, Ranade, were found guilty by a unanimous verdict of the jury and sentenced to death.

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir Rennell Rodd, April 9th, 1899.

## CHAPTER II

### PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

JANUARY—APRIL 1899

THE questions dealt with in the last chapter had necessarily occupied a prominent place in the Viceroy's programme of work. But exacting though they were, they did not prevent him from casting his eye, at the very outset of his term of office, over the long land frontiers which had always possessed so great a fascination for him, and taking stock of the position at different points of contact with possibly hostile neighbours. And in more than one direction he found unwelcome indications of the attention which Russia was paying to India and the adjacent countries. At Rangoon, where no Russian mercantile interests of any sort existed, the Russian Government was seeking to establish a vice-consulate. Against this proposal the Viceroy entered a vigorous protest. In far away Kashgar the Russian representative was adopting a markedly hostile attitude towards the British agent, "and was utilising his want of consular rank to belittle and disparage him in the eyes of the Chinese."<sup>1</sup> We had ample grounds under our Treaties with China for claiming consular rank for our representative, and Lord Curzon expressed a strong hope that Lord Salisbury would take the matter up with the Chinese Government.

Nearer the northern frontier he viewed with some concern the relations between Sikhim and Tibet. The former was under our protection, and we had, therefore, definite obligations towards her ruler, yet when her borders were violated by the Tibetans we were

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 19th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

obliged, in accordance with existing diplomatic engagements, to apply for redress to China. The position was "most ignominious, and the use of the Chinese Amban, as an intermediary, an admitted farce."<sup>1</sup> At a later date the diplomatic fiction under which China, as the suzerain Power, claimed the right of conducting the foreign affairs of Tibet, gave rise to large developments, culminating in an expedition on a considerable scale to Lhasa. That was not to be until 1904 ; but the Despatch which may be said to have set in motion this momentous train of events was penned in the opening weeks of 1899, and the most pregnant paragraph in the original draft of it was in the Viceroy's own handwriting.

Within the frontier itself Lord Curzon found, to his surprise, an almost complete absence of friendly intercourse between the Government of India and Nepal. This isolation of a powerful neighbour seemed to him to be anomalous and unwise, and he at once gave every encouragement to the Prime Minister, who was the *de facto* ruler of the country, to pay an official visit to Calcutta, while forming in his own mind the ambition of being the first Indian Viceroy to visit its capital, Kathmandu. In due course intimation was received that the Maharaja Prime Minister would be pleased to come to Calcutta, for the purpose of paying his respects to the new Viceroy. "He is very sensitive about the reception he will meet with ; but all, I think, has been satisfactorily arranged."<sup>2</sup> At the first official audience which the distinguished visitor was granted the Viceroy informed him of his hope to return in person, in due course, the compliment which the ruler of Nepal had paid him. "This, I believe, rather took the breath away of the Nepalese Embassy"<sup>3</sup> ; but he hoped by his attitude at subsequent interviews to disarm any suspicion of interference in the affairs of the State to which this announcement might have given rise.

Continuing his survey of the frontier westwards, his eye alighted next upon the long, sinuous tract of rugged and hungry mountain land which hemmed in the dusty trans-Indus plain, and served the purpose of a vast entanglement separating off the Indian Empire from the Kingdom of Afghanistan—a turbulent Alsatia which at

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., January 26th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 9th, 1899.

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

one moment invited and the next repelled the solicitude of Great Britain ; a fatal magnet to the venturesome, a bugbear to the timid, and, sooner or later, the despair of all who attempted to solve the perennial problem which it presented. For Lord Curzon, as must be apparent from what has already been written, it possessed an irresistible attraction, and he lost little time in getting to grips with its thorny complexities.

As far back as the autumn of 1897, before the end of the Tirah campaign was clearly in sight, the Secretary of State had telegraphed to Lord Elgin, urging that a political settlement should follow as speedily as possible on the termination of military operations in the field ; and on January 28th, 1898, he had forwarded a long Despatch to the Government of India reviewing the events of the past and outlining the broad principles underlying the frontier policy to which Her Majesty's Government were resolved to adhere. These were, in brief, the concentration of military forces to the best possible advantage to enable the Government to discharge its responsibilities and the avoidance of any extension of administrative control over the independent tribes occupying the twenty-five thousand square miles of territory which lay between the administrative frontier of British India and the political frontier of Afghanistan. As a matter of detail—though detail of the highest importance—the maintenance of the Khyber pass as a safe artery of communication and of trade was specifically laid down as an essential measure, whether viewed from the standpoint of the obligations of Government to the Amir of Afghanistan or from that of the protection of British subjects. Thus the broad policy to be pursued had been laid down and the task awaiting the new Viceroy was that of determining how best to apply the principles to the actual circumstances as he found them.

It seemed to him that before dealing with the question as a whole the ground might conveniently be cleared by the disposal of certain subsidiary matters, such as the military dispositions necessary to give command of the avenues of approach to the more important strategic positions on or beyond the administrative frontier. And it was to these preliminary questions that he devoted his attention during his first three months in Calcutta, before plunging into "the vortex of the larger issue which has engulfed and drowned so

## CURZON, 1899

many disputants during the past twenty years.”<sup>1</sup> He was quick to come to conclusions on these points, and he drafted and submitted to his colleagues notes dealing with the Khyber, Chitral and Samana in rapid succession. There remained the Tochi and Gomal positions, which he was anxious to deal with, and which he doubtless would have disposed of with the same celerity, had it not been for the dilatoriness of the Punjab Government in submitting its views.

“For five months,” he wrote later, “the question has lain forgotten in a pigeon-hole in Lahore and would very likely not have emerged for five months more but for my intervention.”<sup>2</sup>

It soon became clear that neither the soldiers who hoped for, nor the prophets who had predicted, a policy involving the expenditure of huge sums upon the fortification of the frontier were going to be gratified. “I do not want to go and spend a lot of money on the Khyber. . . I have a strong *a priori* distrust of military schemes for great defensive posts and forts on and across the border.”<sup>3</sup> His solution of the military problem was, in fact, very far from being that of an eager adherent of the forward school. The best concentration of our military forces was to be found in the withdrawal of British and Indian regular troops to bases within the administrative frontier. Advanced posts in tribal territory should be held by tribal levies and communication between such outposts and their bases should take the shape, where necessary, of light narrow-gauge railways. “I want to have all our troops ready when we call upon them for the big things instead of being wasted on the small things. Easy lines of advance, troops ready to march without delay, and light railways to hurry on their transport from the base—these seem to be the principles at which we should aim.”<sup>4</sup> It will be seen that his solution of the military problem was founded on the principles which he had outlined in his much discussed speech in the House of Commons a year earlier, namely, that we should select the lines of communication which it was necessary to keep open; that we should enter into confidential relations with the tribes; that we should concentrate our forces in

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 16th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 19th.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 2nd, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to Field Marshal Sir Donald Stewart, March 30th, 1899.

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

carefully chosen positions instead of diffusing them over scattered areas, and that, recognising that it was by force of character rather than by weight of cannon that we should most successfully acquire control over the frontier tribes, we should select our frontier officers with special care.<sup>1</sup> His was, indeed, a moderate and economical policy carried against a considerable weight of military opinion. It ought to have rejoiced the heart of the *Westminster Gazette*, whose ideal Viceroy was "a man of weight and authority who could stand up to all encroaching military gentlemen and refuse to be pushed into a forward frontier policy by any exaggerated alarm about remote dangers."<sup>2</sup>

His proposals for dealing with the Khyber which were accepted by his colleagues resulted in a saving of at least six lakhs of rupees on the scheme of elaborate fortification which had hitherto held the field at an estimated cost of eight or nine lakhs. Yet so persistent was the belief in some quarters that he was bent upon a costly forward policy where the frontier was concerned, that to his extreme annoyance and disgust a message was telegraphed home to *The Times*, charging him with having sanctioned an expenditure of twelve lakhs on the fortification of the pass.

Having carried his Government with him in the matter of the Khyber, he proceeded with his proposals for dealing with Chitral and Samana. As in the case of the Khyber, schemes for the elaborate fortification of these places were brushed aside. "Our military authorities appear to have passed from an extreme of confidence before the last campaign into a corresponding extreme of panic since, and are satisfied with nothing short of gigantic forts large enough to hold enormous garrisons and strong enough to resist an attack by the whole Russian army."<sup>3</sup> But the policy underlying his proposals for dealing with the military aspect of the frontier problem was steadily winning ground. Early in March he reported that Sir William Lockhart, with whom he had discussed matters before the latter started on a tour of personal inspection along the frontier, seemed ready to accept with some modifications

<sup>1</sup>See Vol. I, page 300.

<sup>2</sup>*Westminster Gazette* of August 10th, 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 16th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

"the more modest conception of our military responsibilities there which I have ventured to put forward";<sup>1</sup> and on March the 30th he was able to inform the Secretary of State that he had carried his Samana proposals "with scarcely any difficulty." Decisions with regard to the remaining advanced posts were taken during the summer, and early in August the policy which had by then received the sanction of the Secretary of State was made known to the public.

The press, both in India and in Great Britain, was quick to grasp the importance of the decisions which had been taken, and was almost unanimous in its approval. *The Times of India* declared that they constituted "the most important work hitherto undertaken by Lord Curzon in the domain of Indian statesmanship," and added that he had gone far towards pleasing all sides in an extremely embittered controversy.<sup>2</sup> Other writers commended the policy equally upon economic and upon political grounds. In England *The Spectator* expressed cordial approval of the new policy, "which will cost comparatively little, yet increase, if an emergency arises, our means of striking rapidly and hard."<sup>3</sup> On one point only were any serious doubts entertained—whether the tribal levies would in all cases prove worthy of the confidence which was now being placed in them. In the opinion of *The Times*, which approved generally of what was being done, the lawlessness recently displayed by the Waziris provided justification for such doubts. And the writer commented pointedly on the fact that whereas the policy was based largely on an increase of strategic railways, the Khyber railway had apparently been dropped.<sup>4</sup>

Lord Curzon was little moved by these fears concerning the tribal levies, because he believed that they rested upon a misapprehension. "I am hopeful, but not a bit over-sanguine, as to the success of the experiment. When, however, *The Times* says there is great risk, because the Waziri levies have already shown of what treacherous material they are made, the writer is ignorant of the difference between the old Sillahdari levies—who were salaried

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 16th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Times of India*, August 8th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Spectator*, August 12th, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>*The Times*, August 8th, 1899.

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

loafers and ruffians, and whom we are abolishing—and the new levies, who will be a semi-military corps, not under corrupt Maliks, but under British officers.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the omission from the programme of a railway up the Khyber was certainly open to comment, for there had been a time when Lord Curzon had himself argued strongly in favour of such a project.<sup>2</sup> This particular railway had been abandoned because, on a careful re-consideration of all the circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that the time was inopportune for pressing it. He was doubtful of the feasibility of constructing a broad-gauge railway through the pass, and until it was definitely established that the alternative route up the Kabul river valley was not superior, he declined to embark on so costly an undertaking. He thought, too, that to construct a railway of any sort through the tortuous defiles of the Khyber would be to put too valuable a hostage in the hands of the Afridis, while it would also be likely to create an impression throughout the frontier that the Government were about to embark upon a policy of occupation. He was confirmed in his attitude towards the project by a clear intimation from the Amir of Afghanistan of the distaste with which the latter would view the approach of such a railway to his own frontier. That the Indian Government could build railways up to the limits of its own territories that potentate conceded, for there was no one to say it nay ; but in the event of such a railway being constructed he made it clear that it would run to the boundary only, for it would not be extended into Afghanistan “to the extent of even a single span.”<sup>3</sup>

Not until something more than a quarter of a century had elapsed did the Khyber railway become an accomplished fact.

Much had happened in the interval to render the moment for its construction opportune. The Amir Amanullah, with less wisdom than his predecessor, the Amir Habibullah, had embarked upon his ill-starred and short-lived adventure across the frontier which came to be known as the third Afghan war. Another Viceroy,<sup>4</sup> speaking to a greatly enlarged Legislative Assembly, on August the 20th, 1920,

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. C. Lyall, August 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>See Vol. I, page 298.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Amir of Afghanistan to the Viceroy, April 4th, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>Lord Chelmsford.

## CURZON, 1899

declared that "the continual and gratuitous provocation" on the part of the tribes to which this outbreak had given rise could no longer be tolerated, and that among the measures to be taken to enable his Government to deal with the situation would be the construction of a broad-gauge railway from Jamrud to the Afghan frontier. There can be little doubt that in the altered circumstances Lord Curzon would have come to a similar decision, and when, on November the 2nd, 1925, Sir Charles Innes, on behalf of the Viceroy, formally declared the railway open, he reminded his audience appropriately enough of words which Lord Curzon had himself once used—"Every line of frontier railway which we build will turn out in the long run to be a link in the chain of friendship as well as peace."

From this digression let me return to Lord Curzon and the problems with which he was grappling in the month of March 1899. To have secured agreement upon the general principles underlying his frontier policy within less than three months of his assumption of office was in itself a notable achievement. And while discussion of the military aspect of the problem was preliminary to, it could not be altogether divorced from, consideration of the larger issue involved. Lord Elgin's Government had been of opinion that frontier affairs should remain, as hitherto, under the direct supervision of the Punjab Government. Her Majesty's Government, on the other hand, were of opinion that existing arrangements were far from satisfactory, and, in a Despatch of the previous August, Lord George Hamilton had expressed the view that the conduct of external relations with the tribes on the Punjab frontier should be more directly under the control of the Government of India. This raised a question of great delicacy, and Lord Curzon approached it with an open mind. Some of the objections formulated by Lord Elgin's Government to the change proposed seemed to him to be powerful, and he took advantage of his two days intercourse with him prior to his departure to discuss the matter, "with a view to finding out what were the main grounds of his objection to the scheme of a Frontier Commissionership."<sup>1</sup> Various alternative arrangements suggested themselves to him; but beyond the conviction that the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 12th, 1899.

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

*status quo* was unsatisfactory—the handling of a frontier episode by the Punjab Government during the first few weeks of his reign had seriously shaken his confidence in the system—he had come to no definite conclusions when he left Calcutta for Lahore at the end of March. And it is unnecessary to anticipate here the decision which he came to at a much later date.

But if Lord Curzon had good grounds for satisfaction in the success with which his frontier policy was meeting, he found cause for no little uneasiness in developments beyond the actual frontier, but within those regions in which for many years past he had fought so hard by speech and writing to secure for Great Britain a paramount position. Just when Russia was pressing her request for the establishment of consulates in India, ominous rumours were afloat of an attempt by France—the close friend of Russia—to obtain a coaling station on the shores of the Persian Gulf. It was not long before rumour was fortified by definite information that Jisseeh, described as the best harbour for coaling purposes on the coast of Oman and one which could easily be made impregnable, had been visited by the French Consul at Muscat and a French naval officer, who had taken photographs and drawn plans of the locality; and in due course confirmed by the admission of the Sultan of Muscat himself, reluctantly made to the British Political Agent. Not for one moment was Lord Curzon prepared to acquiesce in action which he felt was intended to challenge the dominant position of Great Britain in these waters. Seven years earlier he had written of Oman that it might be justifiably regarded as a British Dependency. “We subsidise its ruler. We dictate its policy; we should tolerate no alien interference.”<sup>1</sup> Here was the alien interference which, in his view, was not tolerable, and he took prompt steps to combat this unwelcome move on the part of France.

Muscat, indeed, acquired sudden and unenviable notoriety. From being an obscure principality on the secluded coastline of Arabia it became a hotly contested pawn in an acrimonious diplomatic encounter between the Governments of France and Great Britain. The Sultan was informed by the British Political Agent in the Gulf that the lease promised to the French Consul constituted an infringement

<sup>1</sup>“Persia.”

of our own Treaty rights with him ; and its cancellation and repudiation in public were demanded. This ultimatum was backed by a display of force under the direct command of the Naval Commander-in-Chief, who had sailed from Bombay for the purpose. The Sultan was cowed ; but the incident gave rise to immediate repercussions in Europe. Lord Salisbury was engaged upon a serious attempt to put our relations with France upon a happier footing, and in particular to arrive at an amicable adjustment of the interests of the two countries where they came into contact in Central Africa. This collision in Asia caused an unwelcome interruption in these negotiations. The public announcement by the Sultan of the cancellation of the lease, while it added greatly to the prestige of Great Britain on the Arabian litoral, gravely affronted the French Government in Paris. Conversations between Lord Salisbury and the French Ambassador led to a bellicose and misleading statement by M. Delcassé in the French Chamber. The British Government, he declared, had recognised without delay the identical rights of France and Great Britain in Muscat and had expressed profound regret for the unauthorised action of one of its agents. This was characterised by the Secretary of State for India in a letter to the Viceroy as "an impudent travesty" of the conversations which had taken place ; it was repudiated by the Government spokesman in the House of Commons, and M. Delcassé refrained from pursuing the matter further in his utterances in the French Chamber.

The public judged the matter by its visible results. The Sultan had been brought to a proper sense of his position, the attempted encroachment of a foreign Power upon vital British interests had been frustrated. This outcome of the business was warmly applauded. *The Times* declared in a leading article that the first act of the new Viceroy of India in the domain of foreign policy deserved high praise for promptitude and decision. While we could have no objection to a private individual of French nationality acquiring a depot at Muscat harbour for the more convenient supply of fuel to such French ships as from time to time might require it, "we must insist that these facilities shall be of such a kind as to afford no pretext for political claims. We can neither ourselves agree, nor allow the Seyid to agree, to concessions, whether to France or to

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

any other Power, which might hereafter be made a plausible ground for such claims."<sup>1</sup> Thereafter the public turned its attention to other matters, and interest in the Muscat crisis lapsed.

Behind the scenes it remained very much alive, and, like a political jack-in-the-box, kept popping up at uncertain intervals to disturb the peace of mind of various highly-placed persons in London, Paris and Calcutta for many a month to come. The whole matter was, in fact, much more complicated than appeared upon the surface. It was governed by three distinct diplomatic instruments—a Commercial Agreement contracted between France and the Sultan of Oman in 1844; a Declaration by Great Britain and France in 1862 by which the two Governments jointly and severally guaranteed the Sultan's independence, and an Agreement between the then Sultan and ourselves in 1891, under which our special position in the Gulf was recognised; this latter Agreement, it must be admitted, containing clauses which were scarcely consistent with the Declaration of 1862. The whole question was viewed from definitely distinct standpoints by the Viceroy and the Foreign Secretary, between whose divergent opinions the Secretary of State for India endeavoured, not altogether successfully, to find neutral ground. Lord Salisbury, while quite willing to protest against any actual cession of territory to France as constituting an infraction of the Declaration of 1862, was not prepared to dispute the right which an individual Frenchman possessed under the Treaty of 1844 to acquire a coal shed at Muscat precisely as we ourselves had done. Moreover, he was annoyed at the prospect of his negotiations with the French Government on the larger issues being jeopardised by what he regarded as the indiscreet manner in which our authority had been asserted. The action taken by the Political Agent in the Persian Gulf had, in fact, gone considerably beyond what the Cabinet in London had been willing to agree to. An ultimatum to the Sultan in respect of a number of infractions of the Agreement of 1891—such, for example, as the levy of illegitimate taxes on British merchandise—had been sanctioned; the inclusion in the ultimatum of a formal demand for the cancellation of the lease to France, though Lord Curzon did not realise this, had not. Still less had

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, February 22nd, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

Lord Salisbury agreed to a public notification of the recission of the lease against which—though too late—he had telegraphed a strongly-worded protest. This in its turn had been decided on by the officers on the spot in excess of their instructions and without the knowledge of the Viceroy. So much Lord Curzon frankly admitted, but pleaded in extenuation that the officer in question had probably never before been called on to present an ultimatum, while the presence of an admiral had probably stimulated rather than modified his zeal. “I am afraid between them they may have caused a *mawais quart d'heure* in the Foreign Office.”<sup>1</sup> At the time Lord Salisbury stigmatised the proceeding as “a serious mistake.” At a later date, when excitement over the crisis had died down, he wrote—

“The only incident which seriously disturbed me was . . . the unnecessary publicity of the whole proceeding. I have no doubt that from an Indian point of view Meade and the admiral were right, and that Indian prestige is *pro tanto* increased by what was done. But for us the more pressing question was whether we could bring our African negotiations to a decent conclusion. . . While Meade was pluming his own feathers, it should have occurred to him that he was possibly ruffling ours.”<sup>2</sup>

In short, Lord Salisbury wanted the matter cleared out of the way as speedily and with as little fuss as possible, and was not prepared to press objections to anything to which the French were clearly entitled under existing Treaties.

Not so Lord Curzon, whose objections did not stop at a lease of territory to the French Government, but extended to the acquisition by any foreign nation of a coal store of any sort within the Sultan's territory. It might seem an easy and proper thing to say—“We have got a coal shed. The French have equal treaty rights with ourselves; why not let them have one too?” But if such a line of policy was easy and seemingly proper, it was none the less all wrong. In the first place, what need had France of such a depot? While Muscat was constantly visited by English ships and men-of-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Lord Salisbury to the Viceroy, April 21st, 1899.

## PROBLEMS ON AND BEYOND THE FRONTIER

war, it was visited by no French ships and, perhaps once a year, by a solitary French gunboat, which had never been refused coal from our own godowns. The whole manœuvre was one of the after-waves of Fashoda, and its object was simply and solely an assertion of political equality in Western Asia. A coaling shed to-day, it would be something else to-morrow, and "the constitutional fiction of equality (for though it rests upon Treaty it is a fiction) will rapidly crystallise into fact."<sup>1</sup> Why make so much of the existence of a Treaty in face of actual facts? Since the Treaty had been drawn up, Muscat, by virtue of its position and by half a century of history, had passed into the British sphere. Let the Treaty right be conceded, but let it be made known to the French Government that insistence upon it would be regarded as an unfriendly act, which would compel us to look round and to retaliate in some other quarter, where we should otherwise be content to recognise their superior interests and leave them alone. That he had unconsciously exceeded his instructions when including the revocation of the lease in his ultimatum to the Sultan he admitted. But he had no shadow of doubt that he had been right in doing so, and he evidently regarded it as providential that he had misread the orders telegraphed from home.

By the end of March Lord Salisbury's African negotiations with France were brought to a successful issue; but the Muscat question still dragged on. During its periodical intrusions the French Ambassador fretted and fumed, Lord Salisbury hedged and fenced, the Viceroy protested, and the India Office resumed its hopeless task of attempting to reconcile two mutually destructive views. Sir A. Godley quite agreed with the Viceroy that if by hook or by crook a position of unchallenged supremacy could be maintained for Great Britain in the Persian Gulf and its adjacent waters, such a state of affairs was greatly to be desired. But between the Red Sea and Karachi there was a very considerable extent of littoral, and it was to be doubted if it would prove possible to maintain a sort of undefined right of exclusion over the ports which it contained, and he, at any rate, would not be prepared to go to war about it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Sir A. Godley to the Viceroy, April 14th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

But if I were to pursue the Muscat controversy to its bitter end I should land the reader far on in Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty, and here for the time being we may leave it. Even in its earlier phases it serves to illustrate the anxieties with which, thus early in his Indian career, Lord Curzon was assailed, and to indicate the nature of the obstacles which lay in the way of effective action in dealing with them. Nor was Muscat the only danger spot in these regions which his vigilant eye detected. At the head of the Persian Gulf the territory of an Arab chief, the Sheikh of Koweit, possessed very obvious strategic importance, and there were indications that upon it the eyes of more than one European chancellory were focussed.

Lord Salisbury was very sensible to the necessity of forestalling any foreign territorial claims in this neighbourhood, and while unwilling to take any overt step towards establishing a Protectorate, was anxious to arrive at an understanding with the Sheikh which would render the cession of any territory to the Government or subject of a foreign Power impossible. The Viceroy was in complete accord with the Foreign Secretary's object; but, as in the case of Muscat, he did not regard the steps which the Cabinet at home were prepared to take as affording adequate protection against the danger which they were intended to avert. An Agreement with the Sheikh was good as far as it went, and in accordance with Lord Salisbury's instructions he proceeded to effect one under which Sheikh Mubarak freely pledged himself, his heirs and his successors, neither to dispose in any way of any portion of his territory to the Government or a subject of any foreign Power, nor to receive the agent or representative of any Power without the previous sanction of the British Government.<sup>1</sup> But this did not guard against what seemed to the Viceroy to be the real danger, namely, the possibility of Turkey ceding the port of Koweit over the head of the Sheikh. There was only one way in which this danger could be averted, and that was by translating the Agreement into a formal Protectorate; and this step the Viceroy never doubted we should in due course find it necessary to take.

<sup>1</sup>The Agreement was arrived at in February, 1899.

## CHAPTER III

FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA, APRIL—OCTOBER 1899

### ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

LADY CURZON had journeyed to Simla at the beginning of March to escape the fierce heat with which spring notified its arrival in Bengal. Her interest was at once caught by the novelty of an Indian Hill Station. “The first view of Simla amused me so—the houses slipping off the hills and clinging like barnacles to hill-tops—and then our house ! I kept trying not to be disappointed.”<sup>1</sup> Her first rapid inspection of Viceregal Lodge, which was to be her summer home for the next five years, aroused mixed feelings. “The inside is nothing fine, but nice ; and Oh ! Lincrusta, you will turn us grey ! It looks at you with pomegranate and pineapple eyes from every wall.”<sup>2</sup> The plan of the house seemed to her to be in many ways absurd. But she consoled herself with the reflection that you cannot have palaces on mountain tops and “a Minneapolis millionaire would revel in this, and we shall love it and make up our minds not to be fastidious. . . . A look out of the window makes up for it all, and I can live on views for five years.”<sup>3</sup> There was one feature of the house which met with her unqualified approval ; “Upstairs our rooms are beautiful,” and she found the plan of these rooms excellent, for the Viceroy’s workroom was next to her own sitting-room—“for this thank God and the architect.”<sup>4</sup>

But nothing could keep her mind away from Calcutta and the man toiling in isolation in the great room in the south west wing of Government House. “My heart has stayed behind so completely

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon to the Viceroy, March 6th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## CURZON, 1899

that the void in my breast never stops aching.”<sup>1</sup> Even a brief separation of three or four weeks was intolerable. “I miss you every second, and wish I had never come away. I never will again; life is too short to spend any of it apart.”<sup>2</sup> There was always something that she might be able to do to help so long as she was by his side. “You made me so happy by telling me you thought I had made a good start the first two months in India. Anything I do seems so minute beside all I *want* to do to help.”<sup>3</sup> A tour along the ridge to the sides of which the buildings of Simla cling brought present actualities momentarily to the fore. “Simla is the strangest spot in creation; it is far from pretty beside the view. And the Public Works and other buildings have made it monstrous. All the public buildings are crosses between chalets and readymade iron houses, and their fluted roofs cover the hill sides.”<sup>4</sup> But these things were soon banished from her mind again, and the letter describing them ends up on the note which ran through all her correspondence with Lord Curzon—“Oh! I miss you, and miss you, and have to keep on the jump not to cry.”<sup>5</sup>

Such news as reached her of the progress of events with which the Viceroy was engaged only added to her restlessness. “I was so *furious* at Delcassé’s statement in the French Chamber. I thought that the F.O. had repudiated Meade and reprimanded him for doing his duty by England in Muscat.”<sup>6</sup> And two days later—“I can’t keep my thoughts off Muscat. . . . You may be sure they will try and make you the scapegoat, but it will and must come out right for you. I wish I could see copies of some of the Despatches from the India Office to you, as I am so deeply, desperately interested.”<sup>7</sup> She read every scrap of news of the Viceroy’s doings in the press and became anxious at his tireless activity. “No amount of pleading from me will keep you from doing too much. We have all been shocked at the awful number of things you do daily—and in such heat, too. Oh! do listen, and don’t do so many things every afternoon—your life and your strength are so precious.”<sup>8</sup>

Among many striking passages in Lord Curzon’s posthumous

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Lady Curzon to the Viceroy, March 6th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Letter dated March 29th, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Letter dated March 8th, 1899.

<sup>7</sup> Letter dated March 10th, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Letter dated March 29th, 1899.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

work on British Government in India<sup>1</sup> are those which relate to the story of Warren Hastings' love for Marian Imhoff, whom he married as his second wife in 1777. The deep and lasting attachment which bound these two lives together made a profound impression upon him. "In the lives of great men many of whom have been passionate lovers, there does not exist a record of a fiercer or a more faithful devotion than that of Hastings to his second wife," and if "his overpowering sense of civic duty carried him unscarred through the hurricanes of his public career, it was to Marian Imhoff that he owed all the happiness of his life."<sup>2</sup> Can it be doubted that, as he sat gazing abstractedly into the mirror of history and penning these passages, what he saw there was a reflection of his own experience? Of the task made light and the living of life made worth while by the wonderful companionship which threw such a flood of warmth over all his own Indian activities? Hastings or Curzon—these are but the accidental differences of a name—differences of the kind of which history must needs take note, since history is concerned with the sequence of events in time; but differences of no intrinsic significance, for in the one case as in the other the things that counted—the things which were of the essence of reality—the deep and abiding sympathy welding two lives to a common purpose, the emotional and intellectual fellowship bringing into two lives a strange and inexplicable zest, were the same. And as, years afterwards, Lord Curzon sat musing amid the crowded memories of the past, poring over the letters of Warren Hastings, in which he swore—"I would give half of my life for the certainty of being the other half with you to-morrow"—or begged her—"remember with what delight you have known me frequently quit the scene of business and run up to your apartment for the sake of deriving a few moments of relief from the looks, the smiles and the sweet voice of my Beloved"<sup>3</sup>—he was assuredly living over again days which had filled so great a place in his own past life. It is doubtful if the world ever fully realised how much the Viceroy owed to Lady Curzon. Possibly he did not himself know how powerful was the subtle influence which

<sup>1</sup>"British Government in India."      <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Warren Hastings to his wife, quoted by Lord Curzon in "British Government in India."

## CURZON, 1899

she brought to bear upon his masterful and somewhat overbearing nature. Those who knew him best were vaguely conscious of it. "If there were a few more men with your large views!" wrote Mrs. Craigie, some months after he had been in India. "It seems to me that you have gained so much in sympathy—at one time it seemed the one thing lacking. But I observe now in your actions and speeches that winning note of human feeling which, with intellectual gifts, must always command a country."<sup>1</sup> And again, at a later date—"I have studied your speeches with great care. They show a remarkable development of your tact and a wonderful adaptability to the prejudices of a many-headed, many-hearted audience."<sup>2</sup> Whether from the point of view of his career the influence which Lady Curzon exercised over him was always exerted wisely, is a different matter. From this point of view it might undoubtedly have been employed to greater advantage, had her critical faculty not been dulled where he was concerned, by an admiration so great as to render her incapable of believing that he could make mistakes.

Lady Curzon was not the only person who felt anxiety on account of the Viceroy's exertions. The Secretary of State was equally emphatic in his remonstrance.

"I hear a very satisfactory account of the result of your work in India, but it was also accompanied by the observation that you were working eleven hours a day. Now if this is true, let me offer a strong remonstrance against your continuing to attempt a daily task which is beyond the power of almost anyone to accomplish in a tropical climate. . . . I am not expressing my own views, but those of several of your best friends, when I say that one of your dangers in India is your wish to do too much work yourself. Spare yourself as much as you possibly can, and recollect that in doing so you are really acting in the true interests of good and efficient government in India."<sup>3</sup>

Hints had also reached him from home that the number and length of his speeches were excessive. He admitted that he had been

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Mrs. Craigie to the Viceroy, June 9th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 8th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, March 28th, 1899.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

reported much more extensively in the home papers than his predecessors ; but he denied that he had made more speeches. Every Viceroy found it necessary to inform the public of the attitude of his Government on a multitude of subjects. "What people at home do not recognize is that the Viceroy is no longer the Great Mogul throned in majesty and wrapped in silence."<sup>1</sup> And if the newspapers in England thought his pronouncements of sufficient interest to the public at home to justify their reporting them at length, he could hardly be blamed for that.

Nor did he pay heed to warnings that he was attempting to do too much. On his way from Calcutta to Simla he spent a strenuous week with Sir Mackworth Young, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, at Lahore. Here discussion with a number of experienced frontier officers who had been invited down from their frontier fastnesses to meet him helped to confirm him in the opinion which he was rapidly coming to, that the existing system of frontier administration was anomalous and inherently unsound. In a letter to the Secretary of State is to be read in a nutshell the condemnation of the system which later on he elaborated in the famous Minute which sounded its death-knell. The Viceroy was responsible for frontier policy ; yet he had to conduct it, not through the agency of officials serving directly under him, but through the elaborate machinery of a Provincial Government to which the Frontier and its problems were necessarily something in the nature of side-shows, acting as an intermediary. The result was that "in ordinary times the Punjab Government does the frontier work and dictates the frontier policy without any interference from the supreme Government at all ; . . . but that in extraordinary times the entire control is taken over by the Government of India, acting through agents who are not its own ; while the Punjab Government, dispossessed and sulky, stands on one side criticising everything that is done."<sup>2</sup>

He also took advantage of his proximity to them to inspect one of the recently created canal colonies. Here he found something on the great scale which so appealed to his imagination. The Chenab irrigation scheme had been in operation for four years

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 10th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated April 5th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

only, yet he found a population of two hundred thousand yeomen and peasant proprietors settled prosperously amid miles of rich crops where, but a short time before, had been nothing but a staring waste whose aridity had been unrelieved except by occasional patches of desert scrub. Such tangible examples of the beneficent character of British administration in India were always a source of pride and real satisfaction to him.

By the middle of April he was comfortably installed at Simla. "I feel very far from the rest of the world, including India, and I doubt, if I had the fixing of the summer capital of Government, whether I should ever have brought it up here." It possessed one inestimable advantage, however, for "undoubtedly in the clear and invigorating air, and in the comparative freedom from social and ceremonial toils, the Viceroy can undertake and push on work here which he could never do in the plains."<sup>1</sup> And he settled down with satisfaction to six months of vigorous work.

As will have been gathered from what has already been written, a very brief experience of the working of the administrative machine had driven him to the conclusion that it was in need of thorough overhauling. Closer acquaintance with its idiosyncrasies caused him to give it a high place in his list of twelve subjects calling for early and radical reform. The days of uninterrupted labour which Simla held in store provided the opportunity for the task to which he was impatient to lay his hand, and he embarked with zest upon so congenial a labour. As he probed with characteristic thoroughness into the subject it became clear to him that it was not merely a case of tightening up screws and oiling wheels. A mere reform in the routine working of the Departments fell far short of what he deemed to be required, for the defects from which the system of government suffered were not functional only, but in part organic. And the reorganisation which he effected must undoubtedly be regarded as an outstanding achievement of his Viceroyalty.

In the first place, control from the centre had become so loose that some parts of the machine were functioning quite independently of the rest. Nothing had caused him more irritated surprise than the isolation of the two Presidency Governments of Madras

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, April 13th, 1899.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

and Bombay. "Decentralisation is all very well, but it appears to me in the case of Bombay and Madras to have been carried to a point in which the supreme Government is nowhere, and in which the petty kings of those dominions are even unconscious that responsibility attaches to anyone but themselves."<sup>1</sup> Lord Sandhurst, in particular, seemed to govern Bombay in an atmosphere of detachment which he vainly sought to break through. Events of serious political importance, not to Bombay only, but to India as a whole, became known to the Central Government only when accounts of them appeared in the press. In the early summer a strike of signallers, believed to have had a semi-political origin, occurred on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. It seemed incredible to the Viceroy that a strike of over eight hundred men along a railway many hundreds of miles in length could have been engineered in a moment without some indication of its likelihood being given in advance. Yet the first news that the Government of India received of it was culled from the newspapers. One of the most delicate political problems of the moment centred round the detention of two Indian gentlemen, the brothers Natu, suspected of revolutionary plotting and of having been concerned in the events which culminated in the Poona assassinations in the summer of 1897. The matter became the subject of a considerable correspondence between the Viceroy and the Governor of the Province, leading to a definite demand by the former for a statement of the grounds on which the continued detention of the brothers was justified, and for Lord Sandhurst's considered opinion on the possibility of their early release. To this letter he replied on May the 4th, that the subject was constantly before his mind and that he would not forget to keep the Viceroy informed privately as to what course might be expedient in the future. This courteously worded evasion of the specific issue drove the Viceroy to despair and to passionate expostulation.

"Now, I put it to you frankly," he wrote on May, the 26th, "is that the sort of answer to enable a Viceroy to form an independent opinion for the purpose of advising the Secretary of State? Is it not tantamount to saying to him—'It is quite

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 17th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

unnecessary to tell you my reasons. Nor need you form any of your own. In good time when I decide to act I will let you know? I conclude from your entire attitude in the matter that this . . . is your view of the situation and of our relations in connection therewith.”<sup>1</sup>

He went on to remind Lord Sandhurst that though he had written to him for information so far back as January and had continued to press for it ever since, he was still, at the end of May, “in complete ignorance as to why they are still under surveillance, of what you now suspect them, or what you think they would do if accorded full release”; and he added that the position was one in which “with all respect to yourself and your Government, I must decline to acquiesce.”

The detachment of Madras, though as marked as that of Bombay, was not at the moment of the same importance, and he wasted less ink upon it. “Since I have been in India, now over five months, I have not had a word from the Governor, though I particularly requested him to communicate with me from time to time and let me know what was going on.” Content for the moment with this bare statement of the relations between the Southern Presidency and the Central Government, he dismissed it from his mind with a parting shaft. “Now and then a case comes up in which the Madras Government want to perpetrate some local job which we have to overrule; and they clamour for more money at Budget time. With these exceptions I know far less of what is going on in Madras than I do of what is passing in Egypt or France; and as for the supposed responsibility of the Viceroy, it has long ago vanished into thin air.”<sup>2</sup>

By an odd coincidence his first communication from the Governor of Madras reached him within a day or two of the despatch of this letter; and his sense of humour led him to apprise the Secretary of State of this unwonted event. “Sir A. Havelock, for the first time since I arrived in India, broke silence a few days ago with a short letter to inform me that someone had tarred the Queen’s statue at

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Governor of Bombay, May 26th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, June 7th.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

Madras. Meanwhile a rather serious succession of outbreaks is taking place in the Tinnevelly District, and about this we get no information from his Government and have to trust to the newspapers to tell us what is going on.”<sup>1</sup>

So seriously did he regard this state of affairs that he brought the whole question of the status of the two Presidency Governors before his colleagues, with the result that, before he left Simla, a Despatch embodying drastic proposals for dealing with it, was addressed by the Indian Government to the Secretary of State. What was urged was, in effect, that Madras and Bombay should be placed on precisely the same footing as the other major provinces. The case was presented with the skill and vigour which characterised all such documents emanating from Lord Curzon’s pen. Whatever justification there had been for the quasi-independence of these two Governments before British dominion in India had been consolidated and before railways and the telegraph had brought them into close touch with the Central Government had now disappeared. With the creation of other provinces, larger in area and population, with responsibilities at least as great—in the case of Bengal with its vast commercial interests centred in Calcutta and its highly cultured indigenous population, and of the Punjab with its grave and complex frontier problems, even greater—the difference in status had become a mere anachronism. The Executive Councils in the two Presidencies were an unjustifiable extravagance; the trappings of their rulers an unnecessary luxury; the right which they enjoyed of corresponding direct with the Secretary of State behind the back of the Viceroy an anomalous and mischievous pretension. The aphorism of an eminent Anglo-Indian writer, that while they were *de jure* subordinated to the Government of India, they were so “with a qualified privilege of insubordination,” was quoted with the relish with which Lord Curzon always sponsored a terse and witty saying. An incidental advantage of the change which was urged would be that two attractive posts would be thrown open to members of the Indian Civil Service at a time when there were signs that the popularity of the service was waning, for with the reduction of the Presidencies to the level of the other provinces it

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, June 14th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

would no longer be necessary to regard them as preserves for public men from home.<sup>1</sup>

It is surprising that Lord Curzon should have persuaded himself and his Government that these drastic proposals came within the region of practical politics. The Secretary of State had no such illusions. He did not deny that there was weight behind, and convenience in the suggestions made ; but he did not himself regard them with favour, and he thought that there would be a strong disinclination on the part of the Cabinet to undertake so sweeping a reform. The Government were at the moment far too gravely occupied with the war in South Africa to consider them ; and when they did attend to the matter early in the following year the Cabinet were practically unanimous in their opposition to them. The Viceroy accepted the verdict with good grace, but without conviction. "This morning I read the reply of the India Office to our Despatch about the Bombay and Madras Governorships. I was amazed at the free use made of Sir John Lawrence. He was resurrected as often as possible because he is the one Viceroy who is known to have been opposed to the change ; and accordingly the writer of the Despatch ran him for all he was worth. . . Some day the change will come ; and a future scribe will put Sir John Lawrence on the shelf and will make exclusive quotations from Lord Lytton and your humble servant."<sup>2</sup>

When in later years a change did come, it was in a different direction. Bengal was placed on the same footing as Madras and Bombay, and the other major provinces were given advancement in the same direction.

It was not only the Governors of Madras and Bombay, however, who went merrily on their way as if no Viceroy existed. Officials occupying far less exalted positions had acquired the autocratic mien which sat upon them all the more lightly in that ultimate responsibility for their doings rested upon others. This was particularly so in the case of military administration.

"Our political officer at Gilgit thought it would be a capital thing to construct a first-rate road to Chitral, and,

<sup>1</sup>Despatch to Secretary of State, September 28th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to Sir A. Godley, March 15th, 1900.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

accordingly, in his annual report to the Commander-in-Chief he asked for a lakh and a quarter to conduct this operation. The Chief thought this was rather strong, and cut him down to a quarter of a lakh. I was never informed at all—this, however, was only a provisional allotment in the estimates of the year, and, according to the regulations, no action could be taken upon it until deliberate proposals had been put forward, estimates furnished and the sanction of Government given. Nevertheless, the Political Officer, dispensing with all these tedious arrangements, at once proceeded to make his contract, to engage his workmen and to purchase his explosives and stores. And one day I suddenly found that the decision of this matter, which is one of considerable political moment, which had attracted the attention of Government and been formally discussed by us in Council, had already weeks beforehand, been taken out of our hands and settled upon the spot by the irresponsible zeal of a petty captain.”<sup>1</sup>

Here was a wheel out of joint with a vengeance, and control from the centre was re-established with a rapidity which astonished those concerned. Orders flashed along the telegraph wires. The contracts were cancelled, the workmen dismissed and, where necessary compensated, and the entire proceeding brought to a standstill pending instructions from the Government of India. The Viceroy was determined that the Departments must learn that this sort of thing should not go on in his time. A similar proceeding on an even larger scale, involving a misappropriation of funds and running counter to the Viceroy’s frontier policy, came to light by the accident of his unearthing it from a file of papers “over a foot in depth.” An unspent balance of Rs. 35,000, left over from a sum allotted the previous year for the improvement of the military huts in the Tochi valley, was actually assigned, “in violation of every canon of financial decorum,”<sup>2</sup> by civil and military authorities in the Punjab to the purchase at Miranshah of land “about double the size of Hyde Park, for the future evolution of troops who, I think, ought never to have been placed there at all, and whom I

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, July 26th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 14th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

propose at the earliest date, if possible, to take away."<sup>1</sup> Telegraphic orders were just in time to hold up the transaction, though the purchase money was actually in the hands of the Political Officer in Tochi when they were received.

These were some of the results of weak control from the centre. And control had become feeble because at the centre the machine had become clogged. When it is realised how stupendous is the task of carrying on the administration of a whole continent, with a population the reverse of homogeneous, which is counted in hundreds of millions, through the agency of a personnel which is constantly changing and which relies, therefore, on the written rather than on the spoken word, it is easy to understand how powerful is the tendency towards stagnation. "The real tyranny that is to be feared in India," declared the Viceroy on one occasion, "is not the tyranny of executive authority, but that of the pen."<sup>2</sup> Every matter, from the smallest to the greatest becomes the subject of written memoranda by officials of every grade. Small wonder that those at the top of the hierarchy whose duty it is to reach decisions and issue orders upon the multitudinous matters submitted to them by their subordinates find their energies sapped and their initiative impaired by the effort of digesting the mass of heavy and unappetising fare which is daily placed before them. Unless they be men of more than ordinary initiative the disposal of the bulky files of papers which pour into their offices with monotonous regularity becomes their sole ambition. Their work becomes wooden and mechanical, and unless the directing head of this vast and cumbersome mechanism possesses immense capacity for work, unwearying zeal and an abnormal grip and insight which enable him to brush aside the suffocating mass of detail and to penetrate rapidly to the heart of the cases set before him, the machine settles down into a well-worn groove and, clogged and over-weighted in all its parts, aims only at keeping its groaning wheels revolving. With a facile pen the Viceroy pictured the deadening effects of this monstrous system when he described one who occupied an important position in it, as "of courtly manner and a perfect gentleman; but an incarnation

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, June 21st, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Speech on the Budget, March 27th, 1901.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

of the system in which he had lived his sedentary and virtuous departmental life for a quarter of a century.”

Lord Curzon possessed precisely those qualities which were required to effect a drastic overhauling of the machine. A personal inspection of the various public offices before he left Calcutta had apprised him of the grip in which habit held them. “ In the Public Library I found pigeons flying about and dropping their dirt on tables and chairs, because no one would think of arresting so well-established and consecrated a habit.”<sup>1</sup> A conflict with those who had grown up in a system, the peculiarities of which were thus hallowed by tradition, was not likely to be an easy one. “ I have to meet the opposition of ruffled serenity and of detected jobs ”;<sup>2</sup> but while there were times when he became the object of “ a slight and un-crystallised antagonism which every reformer must experience,”<sup>3</sup> he never wavered in his determination to carry through his reform of the “ grotesque and whimsical system at which,” he declared in a letter to Sir A. Godley, “ I am tilting and which I shall not leave alone until I have knocked it over.”<sup>4</sup>

He early came to the conclusion that the first step necessary to relieve the clogging of the machine was a ruthless curtailment of the amount of noting and report writing customary in every branch of the Administration.

“ Thousands of pages, occupying hundreds of hours of valuable time, are written every year by score upon score of officers, to the obfuscation of their own intellects and the detriment of their official work, and are then sent up to the Local Governments to be annotated, criticised and reported on by other officers who are similarly neglecting their duty in deference to this absurd tyranny ; while finally this conglomeration of unassimilated matter comes up here to us again to be noted on in the Departments of the Government of India.”<sup>5</sup>

The result of all this was that while an immense amount of time and energy was consumed in the consideration of the various

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to Sir A. Godley, February 23rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, June 28th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to Sir A. Godley, May 24th, 1899.

<sup>5</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 17th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

matters calling for disposal, little progress towards solution was made. The system reminded the Viceroy of a—

“gigantic quagmire or bog, into which every question that comes along either sinks or is sucked down; and unless you stick a peg with a label over the spot at which it disappeared, and from time to time go round and dig out the relics, you will never see anything of them again.”<sup>1</sup>

This pungent description was evoked by a particularly bad case of dilatoriness in the disposal of a comparatively simple matter concerning canal rates, in the North Western Provinces. The question which had been submitted to the Government of India by the India Office in October, 1892, had been referred by the Government of India to the Local Government, where it had remained without any reply being returned, or apparently demanded for three and a half years. At the close of this period the papers drifted back to the Government of India and after a leisurely tour of a number of Departments occupying another three years they found their way on to the Viceroy’s table. “Like the conjurer Bertram, after each of his tricks, I feel tempted to say,” exclaimed Lord Curzon, “isn’t it marvellous?” If the case was an extreme one, it at least showed of what the system had become capable. And it gave point to his description of it to a friend—“The Indian Government is like an elephant, very stately, very powerful, with a high standard of intelligence, but with a regal slowness in its gait.”<sup>2</sup>

As a result of a number of suggestions for coping with the evil, put forward in a memorandum by Lord Curzon, a uniform body of regulations was drawn up by a Committee of Secretaries from the different Departments and enforced throughout the secretariat. Copies were also forwarded to the Local Governments, and before leaving Simla at the end of October the Viceroy had the satisfaction of reporting that in the case of the Government of India the saving in writing and in printed matter was already enormous, and that within six months of the inauguration of the reform at headquarters he believed that it would be in operation throughout the greater

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 3rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir Schomberg McDonnell, April 12th, 1899.

## FIRST SUMMER AT SIMLA

part of British India.<sup>1</sup> In this expectation he was justified, save only in so far as Madras was concerned, the Government of the Southern Presidency choosing in this, as in so many other matters, to make a display of its "whimsical and foolish independence." The other Local Governments replied to his circular, welcoming the changes, and stating the degree to which they proposed to incorporate them in their own procedure. "Madras, which is known to have one of the worst and most dilatory Secretariats, replied that none of the evils complained of occurred in their system, and that, therefore, they did not propose to alter it."<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the regulations framed by the Committee was an instruction that when the Viceroy wrote a note for a Despatch his exact words should be adhered to by the clerk whose duty it was to prepare the draft. And Lord Curzon is himself responsible for perpetuating an amusing story to which a strict adherence to this rule in the time of a later Viceroy, "who had strong sporting proclivities and was quite indifferent to style," gave rise. Proposals made with a view to maintaining the breed of the Burmese pony came up to the Viceroy for his opinion. He studied them with interest and noted on the file his enthusiastic approval—"I agree. The Burma pony is a damned good little piece of stuff." With a conscientious regard for rule, the office clerk drafted as follows:—"Sir, I am directed to inform you that in the opinion of the Governor General in Council the Burma pony is a damned good little piece of stuff," etc. The story is told in the second volume of his "British Government in India," and elicits from the author the obvious comment that "the intelligent application of orders may be scarcely less important than the orders themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The anecdote is not without interest, as showing that the pessimism of many who viewed without enthusiasm the reforming energy of the Viceroy was unwarranted. Such persons took a grim delight in foretelling that with the departure of Lord Curzon there would speedily disappear all trace of his reforms—that enthusiasm, for the efficiency of which he was so fiery an apostle, would die down.

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to Sir A. Godley, October 18th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 2nd, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>"British Government in India," Vol. II, p. 128.

## CURZON, 1899

and that the machine would sink back into the old comfortable ruts of apathetic routine. No one resented more deeply than did Lord Curzon himself these “counsels of despondency and despair.” Thanks to his contagious zeal, the whole system of administration responded to the influence of a quickened circulation and a more vigorous pulse. That this new life should again run down, the victim once more of stagnation and decay, was to him a preposterous and intolerable thought. “It is true,” he admitted, when speaking of these great reforms in the system of administration a year and a half after their inception, “that Viceroys are fleeting phantoms whose personality is transient and whose term is soon over. But this is a work in which is involved, not the prestige or the whim of an individual, but the entire credit of British rule in India ; and it is even more to the interest of every Local Administration that it should continue than it can be to mine.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Speech on the Budget, March 27th, 1901.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLOUDS IN THE SKY

JUNE—OCTOBER 1899

LORD CURZON's absorption in his task left him little time to follow events elsewhere. "We seem a long way from home, and the echo of the great world hums like the voice of a seashell in one's ears."<sup>1</sup> Yet if this first summer at Simla provided opportunity for much sustained and solid work, it was by no means free from serious anxieties, due in part, at least, to developments elsewhere. In South Africa trouble was brewing, and the mutterings of a coming storm fell fitfully on the ears of the Viceroy, even if the prospect of serious danger from this quarter seemed to him to be remote as compared with the nearer and ever present menace to Great Britain from the Home Government's inability to realise the need of a definite policy in Persia. He could not understand the excitement in England over the Transvaal.

"Kruger is a mere speck of froth on the surface of the ocean and will disappear; and the ultimate absorption of his country into the British system is certain. If only I could transfer a little of the misplaced anxiety about the Transvaal to Persia and the Persian Gulf, and could get people at home to see that every month, and still more every year, spent in doing nothing now is aggravating a danger that will shortly be at our doors, I should be glad."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir Rennell Rodd, June 29th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 3rd, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

And he set to work on the draft of a comprehensive Despatch formulating a definite policy and urging a clear recognition of the respective measures of Imperial and Indian responsibility in Persia ; some consistent interest on the part of the authorities at home " in a danger which must gravely imperil our security in the future and add enormously to our financial burdens " ;<sup>1</sup> and agreement upon the programme that was to be carried out.

Before many weeks had passed the realities of the situation in South Africa were brought home to him by an urgent enquiry from the War Office whether a contingent of British troops, including cavalry, infantry and artillery, could be counted on from the Indian establishment, and asking to be informed within what time after the receipt of orders such a force could be landed in Cape Town.<sup>2</sup> Even when it was realised that the contingent, which was readily promised, would almost certainly be required, Lord Curzon found it difficult to believe that the Boers would really face the consequences of war with Great Britain. " My own feeling all through has been that matters would reach a point at which we should have to send an army, and at which the army might even land ; but that the Boers would give way, after putting us to a lot of trouble and expense, before the first shot had been fired."<sup>3</sup> He was certainly not singular in his belief. Persons in high places in England in close daily touch with events held similar views. From the War Office Mr. Wyndham was writing in an equally confident strain to his relations and friends, " You must not believe the papers as to the chance of war. I am almost certain that the Transvaal will give in."<sup>4</sup> And as late as the last week in September he still thought that the chances were against war, though in favour of a fairly long occupation.<sup>5</sup> Yet within a fortnight of this optimistic forecast he was ejaculating, " Well, it has come, and we are in a state of war " ;<sup>6</sup> and not many days later the House of Commons was listening in hushed silence and with bowed head to the news of the opening battle and of the gallant officer in command of the British forces, General Penn Symons, mortally

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, May 3rd, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Telegram dated July 5th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, August 30th, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from George Wyndham to his Father, September 11th 1899.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. to his Mother, September 24th, 1899.      <sup>6</sup>Ibid., October 1st, 1899.

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

wounded. All calculations in Great Britain were divorced from the realities of the situation, and these views held in high places were reflected in the complacent optimism which coloured the outlook of the British public until it was shattered by the unexpected resistance put up by the Boers in the field.

When, on September the 8th, definite telegraphic orders were received for the immediate despatch of the Indian contingent, the matter was pressed vigorously forward ; the first transport sailed from Bombay on the 17th, and early in October the Cabinet cabled a message of appreciation and admiration at the promptitude with which the troops from India were being delivered. Later on, when the magnitude of the task which lay before Great Britain was becoming apparent, Lord Curzon not only agreed to the despatch of reinforcements, but made a spontaneous offer of a contingent from the native army ; and while he appreciated the reasons for the refusal of the offer, he none the less regretted the decision. In his speech on the Budget on March the 28th, 1900, he spoke with satisfaction of the despatch of over 8,000 British troops as well as 3,000 Indians for non-combatant service, and he added that he would have been glad if the British Government had seen its way to employ both cavalry and infantry of the Indian army.

“ At an early stage of the war I made an offer on behalf of the Indian Government to send a large force. I should have been willing to send 10,000 men. I believe that, had the offer been accepted, it would have provoked an outburst of the heartiest satisfaction in this country, where the manifestations of loyalty have been so widespread and in my opinion so conspicuously genuine.”

It was not only the demands made upon India by the course of events in South Africa that broke in upon the programme of work which the Viceroy had mapped out for himself during the summer recess. Nearer at hand, like clouds in a lowering sky, anxieties to which no Viceroy can for long remain a stranger were beginning to take form and substance. The rains were late in breaking, and when they came were light. Only those who have experienced it can understand the tense anxiety with which in India man turns, when

## CURZON, 1899

summer is at its height, to scan the western sky. Day by day he goes forth wearily to his toil, dragging his limbs listlessly over the parched surface of the land. And as he returns in the evening from the torrid burden of the day to the hot oppression of the night he gazes with ever-increasing craving for the first faint signs of the approaching rains. And as day by day the sun pursues its course across an unflecked sky and rains down heat on to the scorched and stricken fields, hope flickers out like the flame of a lamp in which the oil has run dry, and despair settles down upon his world. The grain withers in the husk ; the lowing of the kine dies down ; starvation and disease drive man and beast remorselessly to their pitiful doom.

Not the least, consequently, among Lord Curzon's preoccupations during this first summer was the outlook foreshadowed by his anxious perusal of the meteorological reports. By the beginning of August he was writing home of the gloomy prospects which the daily returns were gravely impressing upon his notice ; and before the month was out he was beginning to fear the worst. "There has been scarcely any rain along the west coast ; we hear from every side of withering crops and rising prices of grain, and both in the Deccan and Gujerat the menace of scarcity is becoming serious. The outlook in the Central Provinces is also gloomy, and although there is still hope that we may escape from famine, it is almost certain that we shall have great distress."<sup>1</sup>

Later reports told of cattle perishing of starvation and in many places of gratuitous relief being in full swing. Energetic steps were taken to fight the twin menace of disease and want. Village relief organisations were rapidly completed so that distribution might begin the moment it was required ; settlement operations were suspended in the affected districts ; the districts themselves were split up into relief circles ; additional officers were appointed on special duty, and a code of instructions issued to all concerned to acquaint them with their duties. While the Viceroy saw to it that no precaution that prescience could devise was neglected, he refused to banish hope that the worst might yet be averted. He could not then foresee that during the ensuing twelve months he would be called upon to cope with the results of a drought unprecedented in

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, August 23rd, 1899.

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

extent and intensity in the whole annals of British administration in India. It was not, indeed, till a year later that the unparalleled magnitude of the calamity could be fully appreciated.

In the meantime, amid these grave preoccupations, Lord Curzon's peace of mind was suddenly disturbed by an untoward occurrence which stirred to its depth the love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity which were so deeply implanted in his moral nature. An offence of a peculiarly revolting character had been perpetrated by British soldiers against a native woman in Burma. Both on moral and on disciplinary grounds the crime itself called for swift and exemplary punishment. Not only was punishment not meted out, but the military authorities on the spot showed a culpable disposition to hush the whole matter up, and were seconded in their attempt by the apathy of the local civil officials. Any hopes, however, which they may have cherished that the matter would pass unnoticed were destined to be rudely shattered. Whispers of what had occurred reached the ears of the Viceroy, and the matter speedily acquired a wide publicity and those concerned in it an unenviable notoriety.

The prosecution which was ordered broke down on a technical point, though it was plain to everyone that an acquittal of the accused persons involved a grave miscarriage of justice. Lord Curzon was determined, not only that the offenders should suffer the punishment which they deserved, but that it should be made manifest to the world that official laxity in bringing to account persons guilty of offences against the people of the land would not be tolerated. He pursued the matter with a vehemence born of his horror of injustice and his passionate regard for the honour of his race. No considerations of personal ease, no risk of unpopularity with his own people, no suggestion that with the best will in the world he might only end by fanning into flame the smouldering embers of bitter racial animosities, would induce him to rest until their reputation for justice, which he regarded as the greatest asset of the British people in the discharge of their task in India, had been vindicated. It was not that he was insensible to the danger of his attitude being misunderstood. He did not disguise from himself the possibility that the public, unaware of the extent to which the officials both civil and military had failed in their duty, and viewing

## CURZON, 1899

the matter as an isolated instance of depravity on the part of a handful of soldiers, might regard the wide range and severity of the sentences which he was determined to see enforced, as being out of all proportion to the seriousness of the case. "It may well be that . . . there will be a great outcry on the part of the services against the apparent harshness of the verdict," he wrote to the Secretary of State, when he had finally decided upon the nature and extent of the action to be taken, "and even a formidable attack upon myself";<sup>1</sup> and reverting to this aspect of the case a little later—"I have throughout felt rather like someone standing on the brink of the roaring crater of Vesuvius with justice and honour imperiously thrusting him forward, and circumspection and self-interest more cautiously pushing him back."<sup>2</sup>

The action eventually taken in conjunction with the Commander-in-Chief, who was throughout in full agreement with him on the necessity for stern measures, was, as he had informed the Secretary of State he intended it to be, "unmistakable in significance as well as trenchant in operation." The culprits were dismissed from the army; high military officers were severely censured, and in certain cases relieved of their commands; the regiment was banished for two years to Aden, where all leave and indulgences were stopped; the civil officials were severely censured, and, finally, on the insistence of the Viceroy and in the face of some doubts and hesitations on the part of his Government, an Order in Council was issued in which "the sense of profound horror and repugnance" with which the incident was viewed by Government was placed on record, and "the negligence and apathy that were displayed in responsible quarters" were reprobated.

That Lord Curzon had passed through a period of "great mental perturbation" on account of this trying episode is frankly admitted in a letter to the Secretary of State. And if his courage met with its reward in the almost unanimous approval of the English press, both in India and at home, his apprehensions were justified by comment here and there which reflected a certain restiveness amongst the services. While plying his reforming broom in the various Government Departments, the "young-man-in-a-hurry," as he was fur-

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, October 18th, 1899. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

tively nicknamed, had trodden rather heavily upon a good many people's corns. It was all very well for him to imagine that he could "make the world go round a little faster by kicking it"; but those who bore the brunt of the kicking were not likely to forego any opportunity that came their way of giving vent to their resentment. Such an opportunity presented itself in the shape of a scribe with a grievance and a clever and satirical pen. From the safe shelter of anonymity—which it is now, perhaps, unnecessary to tear aside—the scribe in question, adopting the nom-de-plume "Civilis," wrote scathingly of the Viceroy and his doings in the pages of the *Contemporary Review*. The Rangoon outrage, after being very properly denounced by the writer, was described as "certainly an irritating thing to happen in a Viceroyalty of unblemished intention"; but there were many who thought that "the banishment of the whole regiment to Aden, the compulsory retirement of its colonel and sergeant-major, the resignation of its adjutant and the summary discharge of the offenders from the army, a disproportionate retribution." The Order-in-Council was singled out for particular condemnation. "The spectator stands amazed at the apparent lack of sense of proportion implied in this official order." There was "a black and damning emphasis about blame so expressed," which would last long after the emotions which had inspired it "had faded from the mind of the most immaculate Viceroy." It bore "the unmistakable imprint of His Excellency's attitude towards Sin"; and then followed a sneer which, by making clear the spirit of pique in which the article was conceived, discounted its value as an indication of public feeling—"We keep forgetting out here, so far from civilising influences, that there is a political use even for dirty linen; but Lord Curzon remembers that in Clapham it all depends on the soap, and resolutely rolls up his shirt sleeves. O Clapham, how grateful you should be."<sup>1</sup>

In the Indian press his "persistent determination to see justice done" in the Rangoon outrage had been heartily applauded as the one redeeming feature in the case.<sup>2</sup> Far otherwise was it when his action in connection with the Calcutta Municipal Bill came under consideration. His attitude in this matter gave rise to a storm of

<sup>1</sup>*Contemporary Review* for August, 1900. <sup>2</sup>RASH GOPTA of April 29th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1899

protest by the Indian Nationalist party, which afforded the first serious indication of the clash which gradually disclosed itself between Lord Curzon's ideals in the matter of government and the aspirations of modern India. In this case he was the heir to, rather than the author of, the bone of contention. He had modified the Bill which the Bengal Government had devised for reforming the Calcutta Corporation. But the Bill of the Bengal Government, equally with Lord Curzon's Bill, which took its place, was calculated to excite the hostility of the Indian Nationalists, for the aim of the one equally with that of the other, was the curtailment of the power of the elected element in the body which, rightly or wrongly, was alleged to have been responsible for grave maladministration of the affairs of the city. He was, however, at one with the Bengal Government in his conviction that such curtailment was necessary in the interests of the efficient administration of the city. And for the Viceroy this was the paramount consideration before which all else must give way.

That there would be "an explosion of native wrath," at what would be described as "the disenfranchisement imposed upon them by this change," he readily believed;<sup>1</sup> but he altogether underestimated the intensity of feeling which the Bill aroused. He scouted the idea, put forward by a section of the Indian press, that prominent Indians should mark their sense of indignation by withdrawing from participation in the government of the city under the altered conditions. "This is one of those foolish counsels that is apt to be heard in the first moments of mortification or despair, but that, so far as my home experience goes, is never followed up in practice. Anyhow, I am not the least afraid of its being carried out in Calcutta."<sup>2</sup>

With the passage of the Bill through the Bengal Legislative Council on September the 27th the storm broke. The date happened to be that of the anniversary of the death of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, and Mr. Surendra Nath Bannerjee—destined to play so large a part in future controversies—declared in bitterness in the course of his concluding speech against the measure—"It seems to me to be most fitting that the anniversary of the death of the greatest Bengali of

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, June 14th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 19th, 1899.

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

modern times should correspond with the date which will be remembered by future generations of Bengalis as that which marks the extinction of local self-government in that city where he lived and worked and which was the city of his love." The political life of the city was shaken by one of those violent spasms of emotion which arise with astonishing rapidity in India and sweep reason before them like dead leaves upon the wind. Twenty-eight Indian members of the Corporation sent in their resignations. Indian newspapers came out with black borders as a sign of mourning and filled their columns with monodies of lamentation and despair. And in due course a resolution condemning this "reactionary policy subversive of local self-government" was passed by the Indian National Congress, sitting at far off Lucknow.

Lord Curzon, if taken by surprise at the violence of the storm which he had unwittingly raised, accepted the situation philosophically. "I remarked somewhere after I came out to India that I gave my popularity with the Native press a six months' life. I send you for your amusement the first note of disillusionment that I have yet seen struck."<sup>1</sup>

It was impossible to foresee in 1899 how rapidly during the first quarter of the coming century a patriarchal conception of government was to become out of date. And before leaving the controversy over the Calcutta Municipal Bill I am tempted to lift the curtain behind which the future then lay hidden. Mr. Surendra Nath Banerjee, who led the opposition to the measure was urged by Mr., afterwards Sir Edward, Baker, the official in charge of the Bill, not to burn his boats by saying anything that would commit him to an absolute refusal to take part in the work of the reconstituted body. He replied—"That is impossible"; and he remained faithful to his word, for he never again entered the Corporation. But by the irony of fate it fell to his lot nearly a quarter of a century later to pilot through the Parliament of Bengal, created by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform scheme, a Bill to amend the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1899. Under the provisions of this measure, which became law in March 1923, supreme authority over the affairs of the city was restored to the Corporation, four-fifths of whose members were elected

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to Sir A. Godley, August 16th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

by the ratepayers. Both the Mayor of the city, who presides over its deliberations, and its chief executive officer were its own nominees, subject only to confirmation by the Government. His final speech on the passage of the Bill was couched in very different language from that of the last speech which he had delivered on the passage of the Bill in 1899.

"To me, Sir, the Bill affords a matter of personal solace and gratification. To me it means the fulfilment of one of the dreams of my life. Ever since 1899 I have lived in the hope of witnessing the re-birth of my native city, robed in the mantle of freedom. I have endeavoured to embody in this Bill the principles which I have preached and for which I have lived and worked, and now an unspeakable sense of gladness fills my soul. I appeal to the citizens of Calcutta to co-operate for its success, which, when achieved, will be the proudest monument to their civic spirit and the strongest justification for that full measure of responsible government to which we all aspire. Let no party spirit mar the fruition of this great object."<sup>1</sup>

It was a proud day for the veteran leader—now Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee. But Fate had not quite emptied its cup of irony. The newly enfranchised body was captured by the Swarajist Party—the party which brought about the downfall of the constitutional party with Surendra Nath Bannerjee at its head, and, by securing his defeat at the election of 1923, excluded him from the arena of public affairs for the remainder of his life. The final prank of a Puckish Destiny was the vesting of the supreme power over the administration of the city which Surendra Nath Bannerjee loved so well in a man who had not "during the whole of his public career been within miles of a municipal office," and who, as the leader of the Swaraj Party in Bengal, had become the bitterest political opponent of the author of the Bill. "The first crowning blunder of the new regime," wrote Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee a little before his death, "has been the appointment of Mr. C. R. Das as Mayor."<sup>2</sup>

The strenuous days of this first summer at Simla were drawing to a

<sup>1</sup>Speech delivered on March 7th, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>"A Nation in the Making," by Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee.

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

close, and in September Lord Curzon sought a brief respite from the daily toil and strain imposed upon him by his many pre-occupations and anxieties, travelling by pony with a small party of his household through the exquisite forests which clothe the encircling ranges of the outer Himalaya to the north and east of Simla. Lady Curzon was enchanted with the Bagchi forest, where the trees seemed to her to be "as fine and as immense as the tall pines in California."<sup>1</sup> The chief recreation was shooting, though game was not too plentiful.

"At 8.30 we went shooting, first riding, and then clambering, climbing, sitting and sliding, and making every effort possible to slay two coveys of partridges. After walking five hours our bag consisted of five head of game and after a break-bone climb we got into camp for a 4 o'clock lunch."<sup>2</sup>

There was far more climbing than actual shooting, and on September the 21st Lady Curzon noted in her diary at the end of a strenuous day that the only head of game was a baby gurrul caught by a shikari. "I carried him home in my lap." This small animal was much petted, and soon made himself at home in his novel surroundings, drinking "warm milk happily out of the spout of a tea-pot."<sup>3</sup> Incidentally its presence in the cavalcade gave rise to strange rumours.

"The Matiana Raja saw the gurrul arriving in state, and thought we were starting a zoo, and immediately sent out and caught a musk deer, and when we arrived this was presented by the Grand Wazir."<sup>4</sup>

The long ride over twenty-three miles of mountain path back to Simla on the 24th brought on an attack of pain in the Viceroy's back, and he was obliged to finish the journey in a rickshaw. Nevertheless, he benefited by the change which, he informed the Secretary of State, had been "a very genuine and delightful one."

It had been his intention on leaving Simla to carry out an elaborate tour of Rajputana for the purpose of visiting, or seeing at one place or another, the whole of the Rajput chiefs. When it became

<sup>1</sup>Diary kept by Lady Curzon.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## CURZON, 1899

apparent that famine was threatening the land, he called for reports from each of the Rajputana states, and his perusal of them determined him to give up the state visit with its inevitable ceremony and expense, and, instead, to travel as unostentatiously as possible with a small staff through the stricken areas, seeing for himself the efficacy or otherwise of the measures taken to meet the situation and encouraging by his presence all those who were engaged in organising relief. Here and there the melancholy tale set forth in the reports was relieved by a flash of humour from some unconscious pen, showing that "even tragedy has its comic or incongruous aspect in the East": Thus the report from Jodhpur was enlivened by the following informative passage—

"In Marwar pig-sticking is the chief sport. With the entire failure of the monsoon, fodder for the pigs is scarce, and consequently, when chased they will hardly be in their proper condition and form to exhibit an exciting finish, and in their buoyant spirits to show a bold front and to make a splendid charge, which form the interesting, the lively and amusing incidents of this manly sport."

In return for the cheerful spirit in which Jodhpur was grappling with its difficulties the Viceroy offered to take a regiment of Imperial Service cavalry off the hands of its ruler and to keep it at the expense of Government in a British cantonment until the burden of famine became lighter. For the rest, he sent Mr., afterwards Sir Thomas, Holderness, Secretary in the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, to Ajmere to advise and assist local officers, and arranged for Sir Clinton Dawkins, his Finance Member, to discuss in person with the Ruling Chiefs the question of Government loans.

The few remaining weeks of the Simla season were occupied with the work of the brief autumn Session of the Legislative Council, which included the introduction of important legislation dealing with the vexed question of currency; with some preliminary consideration by the Viceroy of certain of the twelve questions which he had not yet found time to take up—notably the question of the administration of the North West Frontier districts and the whole problem

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, October 4th, 1899.

## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

of state and state-aided education; and with putting the finishing touches to others with which the summer months in the hills had enabled him to grapple. Among these latter were his proposals for reforming the leave rules, to which he attached high importance. These, after being accepted by his colleagues, were despatched to the Local Governments for their comments. He was convinced that they would result in "decided financial economy to Government as well as in a great impetus to administrative efficiency," and he hoped to submit them to the Secretary of State with the approval of the Local Governments by the end of the year. "It will not fall to my lot to submit to you any set of propositions more important in their ulterior consequences during the time that I may remain in India."<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of his departure he wrote in cheerful vein to the Secretary of State.

"In less than 36 hours I shall have left this place, and my first experience of what I described, upon arrival, as the Simla workshop will be at an end. Without taking too much credit to myself, I believe I may say that the output of the past seven months has exceeded anything that has been known for many years, and that the workmen have been kept to their task in a style which has been novel, if not always agreeable. Nevertheless, I can truthfully say that I have, in most cases, found an ardent response to the calls which I have made, and which I have honestly endeavoured to stimulate by force of example; and whatever be the blunders and the bungles of Indian administration, it has the merit of at least being conscientious and of being permeated by a strong sense of discipline."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, October 4th, 1899.  
<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, October 25th, 1899.

## CHAPTER V

### A WEARY AND DRY LAND

OCTOBER—DECEMBER 1899

INDIA is above all else a land of contrasts. This feature of the vast dominion over which he exercised sway must have been brought vividly to Lord Curzon's mind, as he was driven rapidly down the long descent—untouched in those days by the railway engineer—from the cramped and crumpled hill tops to those wonderful plains over which the traveller speeds towards an horizon that ever recedes before him, eluding his pursuit as surely as did the celestial fruit of old escape the grasp of Tantalus.

On the hill-tops in October the air is full of an exhilarating sparkle. The wet mists of late summer have been swept from the nooks and crannies of the mountains like cobwebs from a newly cleaned and freshly painted building. The night temperature is bracing, the sunshine of high noon invigorating. Down in the plains all is different. The earth still quivers under a burning sun. The ephemeral greenness of the fields in July and August, with its illusory suggestion of freshness, is already gone. The drab mantle of winter without its compensating coolness has fallen on the land. Heat, dust and the fierce glare of the sun's rays, striking pitilessly down on to the burnished surface of the earth, are the things of which man is chiefly conscious. “The escort in front,” wrote Lady Curzon, who accompanied him to Delhi, “drowned us in dust, and we did the same to the canary coloured landau lined with raspberry satin, lent by the Maharaja of Patiala to do us honour, in which Sir Bindon Blood and Colonel Sandbach drove.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From a diary kept by Lady Curzon.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

In years of drought these things strike home with infinitely added emphasis. Listlessness and lassitude born of a great and hopeless weariness of life brood oppressively over a prostrate world. Want and disease sap the vitality of the stricken people ; death sweeps them wholesale and unresisting to a merciful oblivion. Not man only, but cattle and all living creatures, weak and emaciated, lose their grip upon an earth no longer willing to sustain them, just as leaves drop from the tree when the sap dries up in its branches or the child falls from the bosom of the woman whose breasts have run dry. The sight of a land thus smitten of God and afflicted touched the Vicereine to the core. At Ajmere there was no food and a scarcity of water. " People are fed and cattle die in the street, and woe is everywhere, and Rajputana is stricken hard." <sup>1</sup>

It is at such times that the latent humanity of British rule, usually smothered and half hidden beneath the heavy load of administrative routine, makes itself felt. The whole energy of the administrative machine in the affected districts is directed to the work of relief. Its personnel becomes a ministering agency, fighting plague and famine and bringing succour to the stricken and new hope to the broken-hearted. At Jubbulpore and at Nagpur the modest tombstones of British officials who had perished at their posts during the famine of 1896 bore silent testimony to the spirit of cheerful self-sacrifice in which they took up the burden which inclination as well as duty laid upon them. In a speech delivered some weeks later Lord Curzon himself paid an eloquent tribute to their devotion.

" These men did not die on the battlefield. No decoration shone upon their breasts, no fanfare proclaimed their departure. They simply and silently laid down their lives, broken to pieces in the service of the poor and the suffering among the Indian people ; and not in this world, but in another, will they have their reward." <sup>2</sup>

This was an aspect of British rule in India that was calculated to make a moving appeal to the instinct for service which was deeply

<sup>1</sup>From a diary kept by Lady Curzon.

<sup>2</sup>Speech in Calcutta on January 19th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1899

rooted in Lord Curzon's nature. That Great Britain was in India by the decree of a Divine Providence was a cardinal article of his belief. His work in India was constantly recalling to his mind scenes from the patriarchal days of the Old Testament, when kings and prophets were chosen by divine intervention to guide and succour the people. Before leaving Simla he had said in a speech that he would have sacrificed much "for the sight that met the watcher upon Carmel—of the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand." And it is probable that the scene which he had conjured up many years before as he himself stood upon Mount Carmel, picturing the episodes of that other drought whose end was foretold by the prophet with his loins girded running before Ahab to the gates of Jezreel, came to mind as he sped towards the scene of suffering ; for there was much that the setting of the one possessed in common with that of the other. And episodes depicted in the pages of the Old Testament not infrequently found their counterpart in incidents in the immemorial life of rural India. "The whole sight," he wrote, when describing the employment of numbers of destitute persons on a great relief work, "must be wonderfully like that of the children of Israel toiling at the pyramids as described in Exodus."<sup>1</sup>

Those who accompanied him on his tour of the famine districts in the autumn of 1899 bear eloquent testimony to the tireless energy with which he pursued his self-appointed task. In the Punjab, Rajputana and Bombay he carried through an exacting tour of inspection, encouraging by his presence those engaged in the task of organising relief and inspiring by his own example all who were warring with pestilence and famine. As an inducement to others, he and all who accompanied him had been inoculated, before leaving Simla, with Professor Haffkine's serum. Inoculation in those days was still a novelty invested with something of the terrors of the unknown, and a knowledge that the Viceroy had submitted himself to the ordeal was calculated to have an appreciable effect. "It is nothing like vaccination," he told the Secretary of State. "They pump into your arm the best part of a wine-glass of disgusting fluid, which inflames the whole limb, gives you fever, causes you acute

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, November 4th, 1899.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

agony for twenty-four hours, and, in some cases, leaves you miserably seedy for four or five days.”<sup>1</sup>

His inspection of the vast works undertaken for the purpose of giving employment to the destitute made a great impression upon him.

“ I can assure you it is a wonderful spectacle to see some 5,000 to 10,000 people at work on a great tank, swarming up and down the embankment, all working in orderly gangs, the men with picks and mattocks digging up the soil, the women carrying it in baskets on their heads and emptying it on the *bund*, both sexes beating and hammering it down. Hard by are kitchens, where the food is cooked, hospitals for the sick, huts where hundreds of children are fed, and encampments, made of boughs or straw matting, to accommodate the workers at night.”<sup>2</sup>

From Ajmere Lady Curzon reluctantly returned to Simla and Lord Curzon proceeded to Kathiawar, never previously visited by any Viceroy, driving fifty miles across the most sorely stricken part of the country. Here his interest was stimulated by the novelty of his surroundings. “ I was delighted with Kathiawar. There is a flavour about it of an old time, semi-feudal society, which has crystallised into a new shape under British protection, retaining many of its old-fashioned and aristocratic features alongside of almost startling adaptations of the modern.”<sup>3</sup>

In Bombay he spent two exhausting days attending receptions, making speeches and inspecting “ all the paraphernalia of the anti-plague campaign.” He was much gratified by the welcome he was accorded. “ I honestly believe that the people as well as the Governor are delighted at my coming ; for nothing can exceed the warmth of the reception which both have given me.”<sup>4</sup>

Echoes both of his labours and of his triumphs reached Lady Curzon waiting impatiently for news of him at Simla. “ I know that you have little time, but a pencil and half a page will keep me happy.”<sup>5</sup> Accounts of his strenuous days amid relief works and

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, October 25th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, November 4th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon to the Viceroy, November 14th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

camp hospitals filled her with anxiety. "I have been absolutely miserable over the accounts of your doings in hospitals, and Colonel Fenn shares my horror and anxiety. As you listen to no human voice of warning I must turn into a fatalist."<sup>1</sup> These apprehensions were tempered momentarily by satisfaction at the success of his visit to Bombay. "Your reception in Bombay must have been magnificent and it has done a world of good."<sup>2</sup> It had been arranged that she should join him after he had finished his inspection of the famine areas. But she never could reconcile herself to parting with him even for a few days, and the unrest of spirit which these periods of separation entailed is apparent from the note which runs through all her letters. "While you are bringing the whole of India to your feet in abject admiration, I am playing croquet in an absolutely useless Himalayan existence."<sup>3</sup>

From Poona he wrote that the work he was doing was "very hard and exhausting," but added, "I keep my health wonderfully well." Here and at Ahmednagar and Nasik—all plague centres—he found that much had been learned from previous experience. Where it had originally been "all science and compulsion and evacuation at the point of the bayonet" it was now "conciliation, persuasion, the employment of volunteer agency, the institution of private committees, the relaxation of former rules."<sup>4</sup> While he heartily commended this change he was not wholly insensible to the danger of allowing sentiment too free a rein, either in the matter of plague prevention or of famine relief. Particularly in the case of the latter did he perceive the danger of the people becoming demoralised and of an excessive burden being placed on the exchequer by an undue liberality on the part of the local officials. Some time before leaving Simla he had caused an examination to be made of the amount of famine expenditure that could be met from the cash balances at the disposal of the Government of India, without asking the Secretary of State to reduce his drawings of council bills or requiring the spending departments of Government to curtail their programmes. He had been tolerably well satisfied with the result.

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon to the Viceroy, November 13th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 14th, 1899.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., November 13th, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, November 14th, 1899.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

But after inspecting many centres of relief he found cause for serious apprehension. A recent Famine Commission had censured the lack of preparedness shown at the time of the famine of 1896-97, with which Lord Elgin had had to grapple ; and it was only natural that with these strictures fresh in mind officials of all grades should tend towards the opposite extreme. A tour of the Central Provinces with which he brought his inspection of the famine areas to an end disclosed the fact that the number in receipt of relief there was out of all proportion to previous experience. This convinced him that there was a real danger of fatally demoralising the people by turning “ the greater part of India into one gigantic poorhouse ” ; and later information only added to his fears.

“ As soon as I get back to Calcutta I must take in hand the famine question. I hear from Rajputana that the Native Chiefs are beginning to quarrel with a system and scale of relief acquired from or dictated by us, which they say will destroy all self-reliance among their people ; and I am very much afraid that our generous policy is everywhere producing the same demoralising effect. It is a most serious question, both in its present financial aspect and in its ulterior social and political consequences.”<sup>1</sup>

On his return to Calcutta he lost no time in issuing a warning to all Local Governments to be on their guard against this danger. He was, however, mindful of the feelings of the devoted officials toiling doggedly with a heavy load of responsibility on their shoulders, and was careful to avoid discouraging them. “ I did not like to blame even in any individual case, and thought that our admonition had better take the shape of an enquiry.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, cautious though the warning was, it excited some adverse comment in the Native press ; and he took the earliest opportunity presented by the meeting of the Legislative Council towards the end of January to explain and defend his action. Just three years before, he reminded his critics, Lord Elgin had spoken to the people of India of the

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, December 14th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., December 21st, 1899.

famine with which his Government was then grappling. No less than one and a quarter millions of persons, he had told them, were in receipt of relief—a state of affairs unparalleled in the whole history of British rule in India. Now, only three years later, the number on relief was not one and a quarter millions but three and a half millions, with every prospect of this gigantic figure becoming still further swollen. Not for one moment would he think of placing the mere interests of economy above those of humanity. He acknowledged to the utmost “the obligation of Government to spend its last rupee in the saving of human life and in the mitigation of extreme human suffering.” But there had been cases—and he was able to give conspicuous examples—in which relief had been granted with a generosity which exceeded the most liberal interpretation of what was obligatory upon the State. And if indiscriminate private charity was mistaken, because it was as a rule misapplied, indiscriminate charity by Government was worse, because it sapped the foundations of national character. From this danger no Government was immune; against it all Governments must be on their guard. “In my judgment, any Government which imperilled the financial position of India in the interests of a prodigal philanthropy would be open to serious criticism. But any Government which, by indiscriminate alms-giving, weakened the fibre and demoralised the self-reliance of the population would be guilty of a public crime.”<sup>1</sup>

From the Central Provinces he proceeded to Bhopal and thence to Gwalior for “ceremonial visits of the old fashioned type,” being joined by Lady Curzon at the former place. Here he found himself amid scenes rendered familiar by previous Asiatic travel.

“The arrival was a most picturesque, if somewhat comic, affair. There were officials in every colour of velvet, and every degree of gold and silver braid; soldiers on foot and soldiers on horseback; soldiers in every conceivable variety of *opera bouffe* uniforms, some saluting, others brandishing swords, others armed with ancestral weapons; camels, elephants, horses, streamers, flags, arches, guns letting off on every side, men shouting, galloping, staring—and all of this

<sup>1</sup>Speech delivered at a meeting of the Legislative Council, January 19th, 1900.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

going on anyhow, with no particular method or plan, but everybody joining in just as he or she liked.”<sup>1</sup>

How often in the past had he not witnessed the same incongruous mixture of pomp and havoc, of panoply and tatters, of magnificence and tawdriness? On the road in Persia, where “horseman and footman, rich man and poor man, seyid and scoundrel,” jostled one another, “a microcosm of the stately, commonplace, repulsive, fascinating Oriental world”;<sup>2</sup> in the bazaars of Central Asia and in the cities and on the highways of the Far East he had found this same unforgettable characteristic of eastern pageantry. He had been fascinated by it then; and he was fascinated by it now, for it appealed to something in his nature which was fed by the trappings of life, things which he liked for their own sake and not merely for what they stood for. To Lady Curzon it was new, and she noted down her impressions of it—“The way it was new, and she noted down her impressions of it—

“The way was lined with Imperial Service cavalry, and, when these gave out, with state infantry, aged veterans with orange beards and orange trousers holding rusty muskets before them,” and behind these was “the most wonderful crowd of natives, camels, elephants, in every rainbow colour, and native bands on the backs of elephants playing an Indian rendering of ‘God Save the Queen,’ while elephants shrieked royal salutes. It was impossible not to laugh at the splendour and the squalor and the picturesqueness of it all.”<sup>3</sup>

The day was brought to a close with a state banquet, at the conclusion of which the Begum, a charming and courtly lady, came in “and, standing between Mary and me, read in a perfectly clear voice in Hindustani a most graceful little speech.”<sup>4</sup>

Lord Curzon had come to India determined to cement the relations between the Ruling Chiefs and the Paramount Power. Very early in his Administration he had told Lord George Hamilton that

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, November 26th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>“Persia,” Vol. I, p. 274.

<sup>3</sup>Diary kept by Lady Curzon.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, November 26th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1899

he felt certain that they were to be won by a little personal courtesy, and that what was represented as disloyalty to Government was often no more than the irritation caused by friction with overzealous representatives of the Central Government<sup>1</sup>—a view which was shared by the Secretary of State. But there was one Chief whose attitude had for long been so perverse and whose actions had been so unaccountably strange as to suggest insanity, and with him the Viceroy was wholly at a loss how to deal. Maharaja Holkar appeared to take a special delight in defying the clearly expressed wishes of the Head of the Government, and in the teeth of a formally expressed objection to his visiting famine centres in British India with a large retinue during these times of scarcity, he followed the Viceroy round to Ajmere, Ahmedabad and Bombay. He showed an ingenuity in defeating Lord Curzon's attempt to checkmate him which at times proved too much for the Viceroy's ever-ready sense of humour. “I have told the railway companies not to give him special trains anywhere. But he scores off me by taking a hundred tickets and travelling in an ordinary train! What on earth is one to do with such a man?”<sup>2</sup>

Of his host at Gwalior, however, whom he regarded as “much the most remarkable and promising of all the Native Chiefs,” he could not speak too highly. “He practically runs the whole State himself. . . He always has a notebook in his hand, in which every thing is jotted down as he sees it. He goes round on personal tours in his district, sits in court, examines accounts, receives appeals, rates or applauds his local officials.”<sup>3</sup> Here was a man after the Viceroy's own heart. So closely, indeed, did he approximate to his ideal of what a ruler should be, that he declared—with the unconscious naïveté with which he occasionally regaled his friends—“in his remorseless propensity for looking into everything and probing it to the bottom, he rather reminds me of your humble servant.”<sup>4</sup>

Lord Curzon believed that “plain speaking combined with perfect courtesy” was capable of giving a stimulus to the public spirit and patriotism of the Native Princes; and he took advantage of the

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, March 23rd, 1899.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 26th, 1899.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

congenial platform provided by the banqueting hall at Gwalior to draw a picture of what a Ruling Chief should be. After expressing his extreme satisfaction at finding himself in a State where there was "such a pleasing and uncommon blend of old-world interest with the liveliest spirit of modern progress," he touched upon the unique position occupied by the Native States.

"Side by side with our own system, and sometimes almost surrounded by British territory, there are found in this wonderful country the possessions, the administration, the proud authority, and the unchallenged traditions of the Native dynasties—a combination which, both in the picturesque variety of its contrast, and still more in the smooth harmony of its operation, is I believe, without parallel in the history of the world."

It was to the British Government that these dynasties owed the security which was theirs and the privileges which they enjoyed. These advantages called for corresponding obligations, and foremost amongst them was the cultivation of a high sense of duty in the exercise of their prerogatives and powers.

"The Native Chief has become, by our policy, an integral factor in the Imperial organisation of India. He is concerned not less than the Viceroy or the Lieutenant Governor in the administration of the country. I claim him as my colleague and partner. He cannot remain *vis-à-vis* of the Empire a loyal subject of her Majesty the Queen-Empress, and *vis-à-vis* of his own people, a frivolous or irresponsible despot. He must justify and not abuse the authority committed to him; he must be the servant as well as the master of his people. He must learn that his revenues are not secured to him for his own selfish gratification, but for the good of his subjects; that his internal administration is only exempt from correction in proportion as it is honest; and that his *gadi* is not intended to be a divan of indulgence, but the stern seat of duty. His figure should not merely be known on the polo-ground, or on the race-course, or in the European hotel. These may be his relaxa-

## CURZON, 1899

tions, and I do not say that they are not legitimate relaxations ; but his real work, his princely duty, lies among his own people. By this standard shall I, at any rate, judge him. By this test will he, in the long run, as a political institution, perish or survive.”<sup>1</sup>

The full significance of this speech was not at first appreciated by the press at large. The Viceroy’s description of the Ruling Chief as “a colleague and partner” did indeed lead *The Times* to call attention to the remarkable change which had been effected during the past half century in the relations between the Feudatory Chief and the Paramount Power, first by Lord Mayo, to whom belonged the credit of discerning that we had in them “a vast unused force for evil or for good” and resolving that it should be for the latter ; and later by Lord Dufferin, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Roberts, who, by replacing the vast undisciplined bodies of troops which, “so far as they were anything more than extravagant pageants,” were a possible source of peril, by select Imperial contingents, forged a powerful link in the chain uniting the Feudatories and their Suzerain, since the relation dearest to Indian traditions and most cherished by the princely houses of the land was that imposing upon the Feudatory the obligation of rendering military aid to the Suzerain. The success of this policy, it was pointed out, was now demonstrated by the magnificent offers of military service which the war in South Africa had evoked. And the writer claimed, with legitimate satisfaction, that the great force for evil or for good bequeathed by the East India Company to the Crown had been slowly but surely utilised for good, and that the last words of the century between the Princes of India and the Ruling Power as exemplified by Lord Curzon’s intercourse with them had been “words of devotion and trust.”<sup>2</sup>

But when Lord Curzon had chosen the banqueting hall at Gwalior from which to address a message to the Ruling Chiefs, it was with a much more definite purpose than that of breathing pious hopes upon the empty air. His reference to the presence of Ruling Princes on

<sup>1</sup>Speech at Gwalior on November 29th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, January 2nd, 1900.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

the race-course or in the European hotel was the outcome of a conviction that the too frequent absences of these potentates from their own States was good neither for them nor for the people over whom they ruled. And in due course his views on this point were embodied and in a formal document. In a circular letter to Local Governments and Administrations in August of the following year it was laid down that for the future permission to Ruling Chiefs to visit countries outside India would be granted by the Government of India alone. The letter, however, was intended to be much more than an instruction to Local Governments ; it was published broadcast in the Government Gazette, and was rightly regarded as a manifesto to the Ruling Chiefs themselves. It was stated categorically in the letter that the Government of India held very strongly that " the first and paramount duty " of a Native Prince or Chief lay towards his own State and people. In return for the security of tenure which, by virtue of the protection of the supreme Government, he enjoyed in his exalted station, that Government were entitled to demand that he should devote his best energies, " not to the pursuit of pleasure nor to the cultivation of absentee interests or amusements, but to the welfare of his own subjects and administration." Such a standard of duty, it was pointed out, was incompatible with frequent absences from the State, for in proportion as a Chief became infected with these tastes and inclinations, so was he apt to be drawn farther away from, instead of nearer to, his people. This being the considered view of Government, its attitude towards applications from Ruling Princes to visit Europe was summed up concisely in a concluding paragraph—

" The Government of India desire, therefore, to lay down the initial proposition that repeated absences from India of Native Chiefs should be regarded as a dereliction, and not as a discharge, of public duty. Secondly, the visits of such Princes and Chiefs to Europe should only meet with encouragement in cases where the Local Government is convinced that benefit will result from the trip both to the Chief and to his people. In other words, the criterion of compliance should not be private convenience but personal and public advantage.

## CURZON, 1899

Thirdly, in cases where such permission is recommended by Local Governments and granted by the Government of India, it should be understood that, so far from constituting a ground for the early renewal of the request, it is a reason against it ; and that a suitable interval of time should elapse between the return from travel and a fresh application for leave. Lastly, it should be the business of Local Governments, as it is of the Government of India in the case of the Princes and Chiefs under their direct charge, carefully to watch the effects of foreign travel upon character and habits, so as to be able to base their future recommendations, not only upon general principles, but upon a careful study of the individual case.”<sup>1</sup>

There was certainly no room for doubt as to the significance of this document. In some quarters it was characterised as arrogant and offensive, and a few among those who admitted the necessity for some action of the sort thought that the end might have been attained equally well without the publicity. Its publication certainly alarmed conservative opinion at the India Office, where its somewhat hectoring tone was not approved of ; and it was assumed in the highest quarters that it must have found its way into the newspapers by an unfortunate oversight. The Viceroy refused to resile from the position which he had taken up, that publicity was necessary and salutary, and on the whole the reception accorded to his action by the press was favourable. The *Pioneer* saw in it a rider to Lord Curzon’s speech at Gwalior ; and in England the course which he had taken was singled out for commendation by both the *Spectator* and the *Saturday Review*. But all this was nine months later ; in November 1899 the Gwalior speech attracted far less attention than it deserved, and the Viceroy turned his attention for the time being from the peccadilloes of the Princes to other matters.

The tour concluded with a series of visits to places of importance in the United Provinces—Agra, Cawnpore, Fatehpur Sikri and Lucknow. At the latter place he held a great Durbar, the first since Lord Ripon’s visit in 1882, for the Talukdars and other notabilities

<sup>1</sup>Supplement to the Gazette of India, August 25th, 1900.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

of Oudh. Such functions always appealed strongly to his dramatic sense, and it was with very obvious satisfaction that he penned a description of it for the Secretary of State. "The whole function was a brilliant success, besides being, as I thought, a very impressive affair. You will note from my remarks that I regarded the occasion as one of some importance, and that I pitched them, therefore, in a high, but I hope not an exaggerated key."<sup>1</sup> The function, which was attended by over one thousand people, was marked by lavish outward display. "The tent was crowded," wrote Lady Curzon, "chiefly with Natives gorgeously dressed. George wore his Star of India robes . . . and came in looking very grand and mounted the throne. Then all the Talukdars came up and salaamed to him. This took over an hour. Then several mutiny veterans were brought up, and after this George rose and made his speech. He looked very fine in his robes, standing on a golden rug with a silver throne behind him."<sup>2</sup>

Pageantry on occasions he not only welcomed but demanded, for he regarded a Durbar, as he informed those present in his opening remarks, as an occasion of no ordinary significance, "not merely because of its picturesque and stately ceremonial, or of its harmony with the venerated traditions of an ancient policy," but because of the opportunity which it afforded the Viceroy of meeting, in becoming surroundings, the leading men in the community and of taking them into his confidence on matters of mutual interest and concern. The day had come when the rulers "must descend from the hill-tops and visit the haunts of men. They must speak to their fellows in their own tongue and must be one in purpose and heart with the people. Only so will they justify their high station; only so will their authority be free from challenge." He recalled the history of the happy relations between the great landed aristocracy of Oudh and the British Government. The pledge given to them by Lord Canning, that so long as they remained loyal and faithful subjects and just masters their rights and dignities should be upheld, had been scrupulously observed. He did not claim infallibility for British policy, "we have made some experiments and we have

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, December 14th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>From a Diary kept by Lady Curzon.

## CURZON, 1899

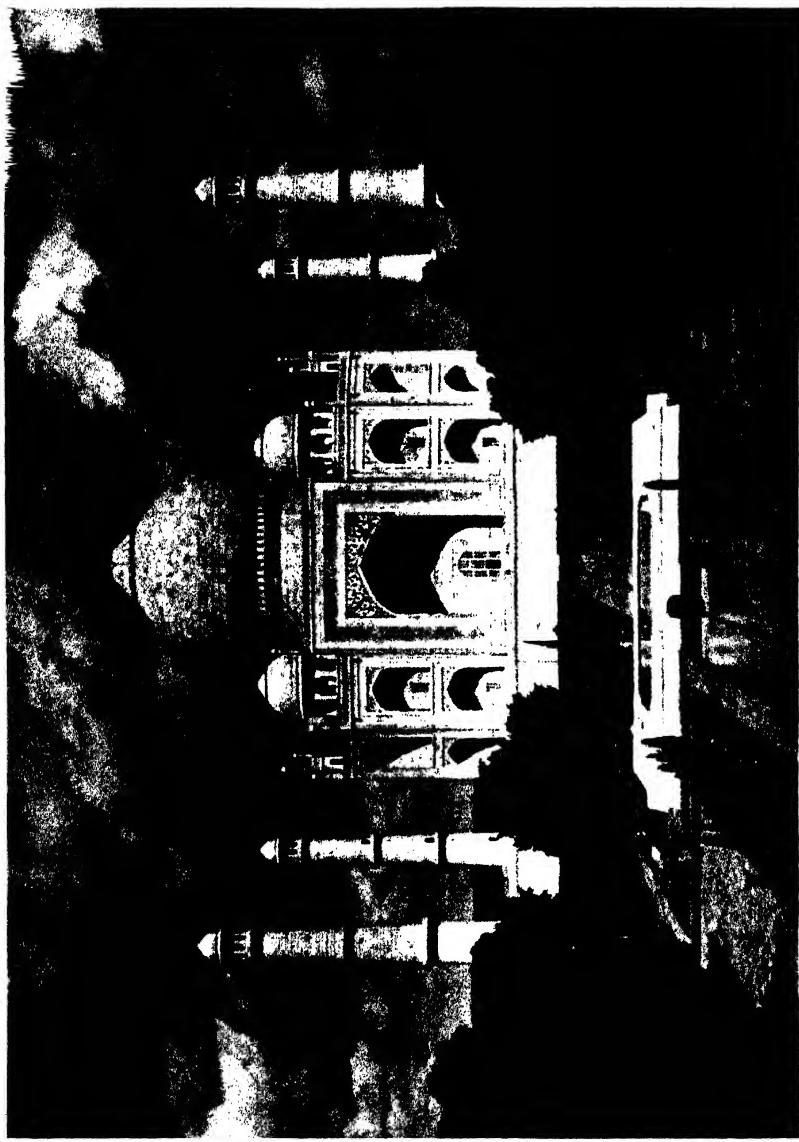
perpetrated some failures . . . but whatever the errors and miscalculations of British Government in the past, we may, I think, claim with truth that we do not depart from our pledged word ; and that British honour is still the basis, as it is the safeguard, of British administration." He spoke of legislation then being proceeded with in the interests of the possessors of great landed estates ; of the spirit of progress which was leavening the ancient conservatism of India, and of the need, consequently, of an enlightened outlook towards education and other concomitants of a progressive age ; and he concluded with a glowing peroration :

" Finally, Gentlemen, let me say with what satisfaction I have met to-day in this great assemblage, and have had presented to me, a number of Chiefs, some of them the sons or grandsons of those who stood by us in the great hour of trial forty-two years ago, some of them—a dwindling number—the still surviving actors in those solemn and immortal scenes. I have noticed upon the breasts of others here present—a seamed and gallant band—the medals that tell me of the participation in the defence of the Residency, of lives risked, and of blood shed in the cause of the British Government, with which was indissolubly bound up, in the agony of that fateful struggle, the cause of order as against anarchy, of civilisation as against chaos. Standing here at this distance of time, I, who am of a later generation, . . . count it as among my highest privileges that I should see the faces and, as Her Majesty's representative, receive the homage of these illustrious veterans. Still prouder and more inspiring is the thought that in this great Durbar, where are gathered in loyal harmony with our old allies the descendants of some who took another part, I may read the lesson of a Great Reconciliation and may point the eternal moral that mercy is more powerful than vengeance."<sup>1</sup>

On December the 21st the Viceroy reached Calcutta at the conclusion of a tour which he summed up in a letter to the Secretary of State the same day. " My tour which is just over has been the longest

<sup>1</sup>Speech delivered on December 13th, 1899.





THE TAJ MAHAL AS RESTORED BY LORD CURZON

*By kind permission of Mr. H. G. Ponting.*

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

and unquestionably the most laborious that any Viceroy has undertaken during the past twenty years . . . The press, both Native and European, have been generous in their appreciation of what I have attempted to do ; and after the long and tedious inaction of Simla, I myself had the sensations of an old war horse in once again finding myself on the field of action."<sup>1</sup> It had certainly been a memorable eight weeks. The whole problem of famine relief and the prevention of disease had been investigated on the spot ; the attitude of the Representative of the Queen Empress towards that most important body, the Ruling Princes, whose sway extends over an area amounting in the aggregate to one-third of the Indian continent, had been impressively stated ; the mechanism of more than one Local Government had been stimulated by contact with the dynamic personality of the Viceroy ; and by means of receptions and durbars the living head of the vast administrative system had breathed into its dry bones a vigorous and palpitating life. For large numbers of people the abstract principle of British rule had been given a concrete and tangible form.

There was one other respect in which, in due course, this first autumn tour bore rich and imperishable fruit. In the midst of his strenuous inspection of the famine districts Lord Curzon had snatched two quiet days at Ellora, in whose remarkable series of cave monasteries and temples is to be seen an epitome of nine centuries of Buddhist and Hindu religious art. Later he had paid brief visits to the far-famed Buddhist stupa at Sanchi and the Hindu temples at holy Brindaban. And then at Agra and at Fatehpur Sikri, the famous deserted city of Akbar, where he was installed during his visit in the house of that cultured monarch's Grand Vizier, he lingered reverently among some of the most glorious legacies of architectural loveliness in the world, bequeathed to posterity by two centuries of Moghul domination. This contact with the actual buildings of a bygone age struck a responsive chord in his innermost being, and gave rise to the great work of preservation and restoration which will live as one of the most abiding monuments to his name.

From his earliest years he had displayed a passionate reverence

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, December 21st, 1899.

for the past. While an undergraduate at Oxford it had found expression in a poem contributed to "Waifs and Strays"—

" So from the brooding night of modern days,  
 The night in which men walk as in a maze,  
 The wand'ring soul looks back upon the feasts  
 Of light and life and love in precious store,  
 Heaped up erewhile by those whose deathless tongue  
 Men title 'dead' and call the songs they sung  
 Ancient, albeit life for evermore  
 Thrills through them and a spirit breath divine  
 Has breathed upon the marble, and the singer then  
 Drank from a draught that hardly modern men  
 May drink, the full draught of immortal wine."

Later it had again been shown by the attempt which he made, first by appeal to Mr. Gladstone and then by propaganda in the press, to have the missing panels of the frieze of the temple of the Wingless Victory and the marble figure of the Attic Virgin which had been torn from the portico of the Erechtheum restored to their original sites in the Acropolis at Athens.<sup>1</sup> Now in India he viewed with feelings almost of shame the state of neglect into which "what are, on the whole, the noblest series of monuments in the world" had been permitted to fall. And he determined on the great programme of restoration which became one of the achievements of his reign. Speaking among the hallowed surroundings of holy Brindaban, he laid bare his mind to the members of the Municipal Board :

" I regard the stately or beautiful or historic fabrics of a bygone age . . . as a priceless heirloom, to be tenderly and almost religiously guarded by succeeding generations ; and during my administration of the Government of India no one shall find me niggardly or grudging in the practical realisation of this aim."<sup>2</sup>

And from the deserted pavilions of Akbar's glittering city at

<sup>1</sup>See Vol. I, chapter IV.

<sup>2</sup>Speech in reply to an Address from the Municipality of Brindaban, on December 5th, 1899.

## A WEARY AND DRY LAND

Fatehpur Sikri he wrote feelingly on the subject to Sir Arthur Godley.

"In the past we have scandalously neglected this duty, and are only now tardily awakening to it. I am, therefore, personally going round with the archæological director of the province, not merely everyone of the principal monuments, but every nook and cranny of every one of them, and am giving orders as to what is to be done. I do this at every place I visit, and I hope at the end of five years to have effected a very perceptible change."<sup>1</sup>

How great was the change which he effected will become apparent later on.

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated December 7th, 1899.

## CHAPTER VI

### WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

JANUARY—MARCH 1900

LORD CURZON could look back over his first year of office with a good deal of satisfaction. "My first year has gone and a good deal of work has been pressed into it. I have startled, and to some extent irritated, the English officials by my remorseless scrutiny into everything. The non-official world and the English away from Head-quarters are strong for me. The Native Community is enthusiastic."<sup>1</sup> And he was happy in his relations with the Secretary of State. "I hope I may be in time to wish you and yours a Happy New Year; and to add the hope that our relations in the new year, my second in India, may be as pleasant, and, I think, I may also say as fruitful as, owing to your sympathetic courtesy and support, they have been in the past."<sup>2</sup>

So much had been accomplished and the measure of agreement between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy had been on the whole so great, that, looking back over his first year of office, it may well have seemed to Lord Curzon that taking his policy as a whole he had been successful in carrying the Home Government with him. The actual differences of opinion had not been numerous, but they had not been unimportant. In the matter of the status of the Governors of Madras and Bombay the Cabinet had firmly refused to accept the Viceroy's views. Of more serious import was the difference of opinion which disclosed itself at a very early date in the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Mrs. Craigie, January 8th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, December 14th, 1899.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

matter of British policy towards Persia. Quite apart from the passing friction which had been generated by the Muscat incident, a difference of view of a much more fundamental nature had developed in face of the threat of Russian encroachments on Southern Persia and the Persian Gulf. As early as March 1899 Sir A. Godley, by a reference to the *natural* advance of Russia in the direction of the head of the Persian Gulf, had stung the Viceroy to a spirited reply. " You will hardly have expected your remarks about Russia and the Persian Gulf to have excited anything but horror in my mind. . . . You reason from what you regard as the inevitable ; and it is a familiar argument in modern politics. . . . I will no more admit that an irresistible destiny is going to plant Russia in the Persian Gulf than in Kabul or Constantinople. South of a certain line in Asia her future is much more what we choose to make it than what she can make it herself."<sup>1</sup> Here in a nutshell was the kernel of the difference—the Home Government regarded a steady alteration in the balance of power to the advantage of Russia in the Middle East as unavoidable, and were not prepared to contemplate a resort to force in what they looked upon as a futile attempt to prevent it. The Viceroy refused to regard any serious alteration in the *status quo* to the detriment of Great Britain as inevitable, and was prepared to take up arms to maintain what he insisted were essential British interests.

It was with a view to demonstrating the falsity of the Home Government's views that he had devoted much time and thought during the previous summer at Simla to a comprehensive Despatch on the whole subject. In the course of it he had pointed out that our interests in Persia were political, strategical and commercial, and had laid it down that Persia was emphatically an Imperial interest of Great Britain, in defence of which she should be prepared to use her full strength. On this point he could accept no compromise. " It should be a cardinal axiom of British policy that Her Majesty's Government will not acquiesce in any European Power, and more especially Russia, overrunning Central and Southern Persia and so reaching the Gulf, or acquiring naval facilities in the latter even without such territorial connections." There were three possible

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 12th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1900

policies which Great Britain might pursue. She might attempt the regeneration of Persia by Anglo-Russian agency. This was doomed to failure, since it was not the regeneration, but the decay, of Persia that Russia desired. She might aim at an agreement by which the two countries should restrict their activities to recognised spheres on the lines of the Agreement which had been arrived at in the matter of railway development in China. Though not sanguine of success, the Viceroy declared that he would gladly see an attempt at agreement made on these lines. Failing this, Great Britain might definitely inform Russia that further encroachments by her in the north of Persia would provoke corresponding measures in the south.

The penning of this Despatch had served to emphasise the fundamental character of the disagreement. No sooner had the Secretary of State read it than he wrote—"Your whole policy and ideas in connection with Persia are based on the assumption that, in certain eventualities, we should exercise force to maintain our position in that country. Now, it is easy to have recourse to war, but is there any reasonable prospect whatever that, if we went to war, we should succeed in improving our position?" And later in the same letter he had given his answer to this question—"I do not believe our position in Persia or even on the Persian Gulf is such as would enable us successfully to have recourse to force to prevent the further advance of Russia; and therefore, whatever policy you may propose in Persia, I do think that you must not in any way base it on the plea that for the protection of our interests in that part of the globe you could have recourse to war."<sup>1</sup> These sentiments were read by the Viceroy with "some dismay," and in a letter dated November the 22nd he replied *seriatim* to the arguments employed by the Secretary of State in arriving at his conclusions. But the latter had refused to be shaken. "You say that you are confident that we can keep Russia out of the Persian Gulf and that we ought to do so, and that it will be cowardly if we do not. Well, I own I do not see how, in the long run, we can keep her out of the Persian Gulf." The Viceroy was quite prepared to explain how this could be done. "If we stick to Sistan, Russia can never get to Bunder Abbas or Chahbar. I imagine

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated November 2nd, 1899.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

that in any case we should hold on to Bushire, which is an almost British town ; so that I don't quite see where Russia is to get her maritime terminus unless we are weak-kneed enough to concede it to her.”<sup>1</sup>

And so the argument proceeded, conducted by both disputants with perfect courtesy and good temper, but with no prospect of either convincing the other of the error of his ways. “ Ever since I have been here,” he told Mrs. Craigie, “ I have been trying to force upon the Government at home a policy with regard to Persia, the Persian Gulf, Mesopotamia and our interests generally on that side. No ; they will not look at it. One day the crash will come, and then my Despatches will be published and in my grave I shall be justified. Not that I care for that. But I long to see prescience, some width of view, some ability to forecast the evil of to-morrow, instead of bungling over the evil of to-day ”<sup>2</sup>. It is necessary to a proper understanding of events at a much later date to realise the existence, even during Lord Curzon’s first year of office, of a grave difference of opinion upon a question of first rate importance ; and it is for this reason that I have referred to it here. Moreover, though the Cabinet as a whole had not yet considered his Persian Despatch and their official reply to it was not received in India until the following July, the rapid march of events beyond the frontier added appreciably to the anxieties amid which his second year of office opened.

The gloom cast over Great Britain by the unexpected failure of British arms to bring matters to a speedy termination in South Africa was not without its effect in India. And as a realisation of the magnitude of the task with which the country was confronted in South Africa gradually spread, so did rumour of Russia’s intention to take advantage of England’s difficulties grow. As the days went by stories of the concentration of Russian troops on the Afghan border with the object of an early advance upon Afghanistan became so insistent that the Viceroy found it necessary to telegraph home, giving the details of the movements reported to him and suggesting the desirability of Lord Salisbury making official enquiries on the subject from the Russian Government. And quite apart from

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, December 14th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated January 8th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

rumour, the actual overt steps taken by Russia to increase her hold on Persia added greatly to Lord Curzon's fears. An announcement which appeared in the Russian Official Gazette of January the 30th of a Russian loan of twenty-two and a half million roubles to the tottering Government at Tehran, accompanied by conditions which could only have the effect of binding Persia hand and foot and taking her over into perpetual slavery, drove him to renewed expostulation. "If you do nothing now, the halter which Russia has hitched round the neck of Persia will be tightened bit by bit till the last breath has been squeezed out of the body of the wretched victim."<sup>1</sup> And his failure to make any appreciable impression upon the Cabinet filled him with despair. "I do not suppose that Lord Salisbury will be persuaded to lift a little finger to save Persia from her doom. . . . We are slowly—no, I think I may say swiftly, paving the way for the total extinction of our influence in that country and one day in the future public opinion will turn round and rend the successive Governments and Ministers who have shut their eyes for a long series of years."<sup>2</sup>

It was not until news was flashed over the wires of Lord Roberts's successes against the Boers that a little ray of hope shone forth to illuminate the general gloom. "Everybody here is very happy over little Roberts's victory, and his statue on the Maidan is being decorated with wreaths of flowers by enthusiastic natives as well as Europeans. . . . I hope it may infuse a little spirit into the other side of the great quadrangle in which you reside, and that subjects or places too long neglected may once again get their due."<sup>3</sup>

There was another respect in which events in progress on the far off plateaux of South Africa added indirectly to the Viceroy's burden at this time. The months of fighting had laid bare many unfortunate joints in the military armour of Great Britain; and Sir Edwin Collen, then head of the Indian Military Department, fearful lest other unforeseen calamities might find the Indian army unequal to the strain which war might impose upon it, bombarded the Government with a whole host of demands, and this, too, at a time when the Viceroy was deprived of the assistance of the Com-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 8th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., February 1st, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., March 1st, 1900.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

mander-in-Chief, owing to a serious breakdown in health—destined, unhappily, to end in his early death. “ We are once again going to have that most distressing of experiences,” wrote Lord Curzon, on February the 1st, “ a full field day in Council, in which all his (Sir E. Collen’s) fresh military proposals, some of them individually excellent, but collectively impossible from the point of view either of expediency or finance, will have to be threshed out by a body of civilians who will be told at each turn that if they do not give this or that they will be responsible for the future discomfiture of British arms.”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the heavy shadows which lay over the landscape beyond the Indian frontiers, there was ample to occupy the Viceroy’s attention closer at hand. The burden of famine still hung darkly over the continent, imposing upon the Head of the Administration a heavy additional load of responsibility. And with this almost incalculable incubus weighing upon the finances of the country, he was faced with the early departure of his Finance Minister, Mr., afterwards Sir Clinton, Dawkins, who at his special request had come out to India for the period of one year, to assist him in laying the foundations of a sound currency policy involving large departures from previous practice.

Then the short but busy Session of the Legislative Council was in full swing, and the Viceroy found himself under the necessity of familiarising himself with the legislative programme of the various Departments. And behind these immediate pre-occupations loomed an array of formidable tasks imperiously demanding his reforming zeal. A Convocation of the Calcutta University, over which he presided as Chancellor on February the 17th, reminded him of the intricate problem presented by the reform of the educational system with which he was anxious to get to grips. Episodes which came to his notice in the course of his daily administrative work brought prominently to mind the urgency of a drastic measure of police reform. Preparations for an impending tour on the North West Frontier served to rivet his attention on the delicate but vitally important question of Punjab Frontier Administration. “ I occupy, indeed, a most laborious post,” he told the Secretary of State, on

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 1st, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

January the 18th, "and the strain in the past month has somehow been greater than at any time since I landed in India." This was due, in some measure, to the fact that at the close of a prolonged and exhausting tour he had returned to an accumulation of work at the very time when the social demands of the capital were at their height.

"When you remember that, in addition, he (the Viceroy) is the head of a very elaborate and ceremonious court, and that everybody who comes to Calcutta, in the service or out of the service, European or Native, globe-trotter or merchant, *savant* or imposter, wants to have a personal interview with him, you will readily believe me when I say that since I returned to Calcutta on December the 18th, with the exception of meal-times and one hour for a drive in the afternoon, I have been at work from morning until midnight."<sup>1</sup>

As we have already seen, Lord Curzon had examined with a critical eye and had condemned with a satirical pen the defects of the administrative mechanism which he found himself called upon to manipulate. "Non est scribendum sed gubernandum," was the motto which he once said he would like to see written over the doors of every Government Office. He found similar cause for surprise at the inadequacy of the machinery which was expected to serve the legislative requirements of the Continent. His own apprenticeship in the House of Commons, first as a private member and then as an Under Secretary, had given him a detailed knowledge of the processes through which legislative proposals had to pass in Great Britain, from their inception in the Departments to their final passage to the Statute Book, and he was shocked at the haphazard manner in which laws appeared to be made in India. The Legislative Department worked for the most part in splendid isolation, the Administrative Departments, when once they had given instructions that a Bill was to be drafted on any particular subject, being of opinion, apparently, that their own responsibility in the matter then ceased. The Legislative Council—in these days a small and narrow caucus ill adapted to deal with Bills affecting matters of which, as often as not, it had no personal experience—was then

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 18th, 1900.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

invited during the brief period available between the beginning of January and the end of March to carry through all their stages an indefinite number of important and often highly contentious measures.

The Session of 1900 was replete with devastating examples of the sort of thing of which the machine was capable. "We have got a Mines Bill before our Council, which, owing to the fact that it is in the hands of a Department and has been put forward by an Hon. Member now in England, neither of whom knows any more about mines than I do about balloons, has excited universal censure and condemnation. Nobody wants the Bill ; the Government of India is unable to explain why they ever introduced it ; I doubt if it could be carried in the Legislative Council ; and the idea of pushing it through in the headlong manner in which legislation is forced into being here is so distasteful to me that I have decided to send the Bill, with the very substantial modifications that we are prepared to accept, back to the Local Governments for their opinions and advice."<sup>1</sup>

This was not the only case in which he thus cut the Gordian knot. "I have already ordered one Bill dealing with the vexed question of coolie emigration to Assam to be withdrawn," he wrote quite early in the Session ; and before the end of it he had dealt similarly with another. "Last week I withdrew the Protection of Foreign Telegrams Bill from Council here. . . . We had got into such an irretrievable muddle over it that no one knew where he was or what he was supporting."<sup>2</sup> In spite of the confusion in which the measure had become enveloped he fully expected to be attacked for withdrawing the Bill at the last moment, and thus disappointing expectations which had been aroused. "Council room crowded this morning with all the journalists," he told Lady Curzon,—". . . and every member of the Council with prodigious speeches, most of them already in print ! Judge of the consternation when I withdrew the Bill. *Pioneer* and *Reuter* will rage heavily."<sup>3</sup> He was, however, mistaken. "To my immense surprise the withdrawal of the Bill was

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 1st, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., March 22nd, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Letter dated March 16th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

received with a sigh of relief. . . . The fact is that there is such an incurable and, indeed, legitimate distrust of the legislation that we are in the habit of passing here, that everybody welcomes with delight the chance of escaping from what might turn out in practice to be either a dead letter or a blunder.”<sup>1</sup>

The working of the machine was not without its humorous side. Basing himself on the analogy provided by the Attorney General in England, Lord Curzon had nominated the Advocate General to a seat on the Council, in the expectation that his legal knowledge would prove of value to himself and his colleagues in framing and piloting through their various stages the legislative proposals of the Government. The Advocate General, however, when once safely in the legislative saddle, developed views of his own as to the duties of a legislator, and for one brief and glorious Session snapped his senatorial fingers at the Government. “I am extremely glad to have have got rid of that gentleman,” wrote the Viceroy at the end of the Session, when his resignation had been secured, “since his whole attitude in Council betrays that he had the fullest intention of posing upon any and upon every occasion as the critic of Government and the champion of the people. As it is, he has moved amendments against the Government at every stage of every measure throughout the present session.”<sup>2</sup>

There was one respect in which the Viceroy found the procedure of the Legislative Council serviceable. When, eight years before, as Under Secretary for India, he had introduced the India Councils Bill in the House of Commons he had explained that it provided among other things for an annual discussion on the Budget and had commended it to the House on the ground that it was desirable that the Government should have a recognised opportunity of explaining its policy and of replying to hostile criticism and attack.<sup>3</sup> He now reaped the advantage of this wise provision, and throughout the period of his Viceregency he made full use of the annual discussion on the Budget for expounding the policy of his Government. On the immediate subject of finance he was able to tell the Council of the reforms which the retiring Finance Member had

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 22nd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Speech in the House of Commons, March 28th, 1892.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

been successful in inaugurating. Among these the sovereign had become legal tender and stability in exchange had assumed what he hoped might prove to be a stereotyped form. " This great change has been introduced in defiance of the vaticinations of all the prophets of evil and more particularly of the particular prophecy that we could not get gold to come to India." But for one thing, the Finance Member would have had a great surplus and could have introduced a popular Budget. He had seen all his hopes of a notable Budget, of a large surplus, of great schemes, of a sensible relief of taxation, dashed to the ground by the waywardness of the monsoon.

It was estimated that before the end of the coming year the direct cost of this calamity to Government would amount to something like eight and a half million sterling. There were districts where as much as from 20 to 30 per cent. of the population were in receipt of famine relief, and at the time when he was speaking no less than five million persons were actually receiving help in one form or another. The success of the famine relief system which had been built up in British India received striking verification from the death rate, which, in the majority of famine districts, was scarcely in excess of the normal. A far more gloomy tale had to be told of some of the Native States, where the machinery for dealing with such a visitation was anything but perfect. Many of the Indian Princes had shown wonderful energy and public spirit ; but without a carefully planned organisation the best endeavours were powerless to prevent high mortality. " The experience of such a famine as this is enough to extinguish for ever the fallacy that these visitations are less severe in their incidence or less calamitous in their result in Native territory than they are in British India."

The Viceroy concluded his speech with a few words of warning on the subject of military expenditure. The first result of the Transvaal war would, he believed, be an increase to the Budget of every military nation in the world. " A storm has taken place in the great ocean, the commotion caused by which will be felt thousands of miles away on every beach and shore. Here, as elsewhere, we shall require to set our house in order, to overhaul our military machine and to profit by the lessons learned." Let no one suppose, then,

## CURZON, 1900

that there was any prospect of reduction in the military estimates for some time to come. There were two great duties of Imperial statesmanship in India. "The first is to make all these millions of people, if possible, happier, more contented, more prosperous. The second is to keep them and their property safe. We are not going for the sake of the one duty to neglect the other. We would prefer to discharge our responsibility—and it is no light one—in respect of both."

The speech was warmly welcomed by the English press, the *Times of India* in Bombay and the *Englishman* in Calcutta both applauding it. "Up to the present His Excellency has carried public opinion with him in practical unanimity, and this in spite of his uncompromising determination to conciliate it only so far as its views may coincide with his own. In recasting Lord Curzon's horoscope at the close of his first year of office it may with confidence be asserted that everything will be forgiven to the strong man—especially when he is strong enough to yield on occasion."<sup>1</sup>

The death of Sir William Lockhart added to Lord Curzon's difficulties. For many months past his health had rendered him incapable of giving to the Viceroy and his Government the assistance which they badly needed. "He has been practically useless to the Government of India since the month of September last," wrote Lord Curzon, on March the 1st, before it was realised that his illness was to have an early and fatal termination and when the probability of his having to proceed to Europe to recuperate was being considered. Arrangements had, indeed, been made for him to sail on March the 20th only a few hours before he died on March the 18th. Lord Curzon had been genuinely fond of the dead soldier, and paid a touching public tribute to his memory. "You will see that in Council yesterday I paid a tribute to the dear old Chief."<sup>2</sup> But he was very conscious of the magnitude of the task which awaited his successor, and in his letter to the Queen conveying the news of the Commander-in-Chief's death he added :

"It is now above all things essential that a strong man in the prime of life should be appointed to succeed, since the

<sup>1</sup>The *Englishman* of March 31st, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, March 22nd, 1900.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

Viceroy would not be doing his duty did he not confess to Your Majesty that there is grave need for reform in many branches of the military service in India. The machine has become clogged with tradition and routine and calls for urgent overhauling, if we are ever to defend the Indian frontiers with assured success.”<sup>1</sup>

Pending the consideration of names to fill the permanent vacancy, Sir Power Palmer, the senior officer in India, was appointed to act provisionally. For the permanent appointment Lord Curzon was determined to have new blood. “ If Lockhart is invalided or dies,” he had written some little time before, “ we want a Kitchener to pull things together. If he is not available I do not know whom to name.”<sup>2</sup> He was well aware that Lord Kitchener had for some time past been turning his thoughts towards India. When the latter had bidden the Viceroy-designate farewell on the eve of his departure from England he had told him that if he wanted him he was always ready to come, and had concluded his letter with a significant message—“ I enclose a photo for Lady Curzon, to remind her of the man who means to take her down to dinner some day in India.”<sup>3</sup> Eight months later Lord Kitchener had dropped in casually at the India Office and had informed an astonished private secretary that he wished to be regarded as a candidate for the Military Membership in India and would be glad to know what chance he stood of being appointed. While Lord Curzon had himself thought of Lord Kitchener as a possible Commander-in-Chief, he had never contemplated him as Military Member, nor was he prepared to do so. “ I am somewhat of a disturbing element in the placid economy of Indian administration. The appearance of another and even more seismic factor might produce unforeseen results.”<sup>4</sup>

It was, indeed, clear to him from the start that the question of Sir E. Collen’s successor, when it arose, was going to be an even more difficult one than that of Sir William Lockhart’s ; for, while he had the highest admiration for the qualities of the British officer

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 22nd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 15th, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Letter dated December 16th, 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, September 6th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1900

in the field, he had the very poorest opinion of his capacity for administration. "There would seem to be some mysterious law," he once wrote, "that makes it impossible for soldiers to be decent administrators. . . . I imagine that, either for government or for administration, some previous training in the principles by which both are regulated is required, and that this is why you cannot take even the most capable soldier from his tent and expect of him even moderate abilities in office."<sup>1</sup> In view of what the future held in store, there is something strangely pathetic in the illustration with which, in a vein of exuberant playfulness, he sought to demonstrate this sad fact.

"I hear that a novel and local storm is slowly brewing in the *arcana* of the military bureaux themselves. The Commander-in-Chief is said to be evolving a scheme for the abolition of the Military Department; and meanwhile I hear that the Military Member, all unconscious of his impending doom, is elaborating a counter-scheme for the extinction of the Commander-in-Chief. It looks as if I, who am a consistent though amicable antagonist of both, would ultimately have to step in to save them from mutual destruction at each other's hands."<sup>2</sup>

Military administration in India was, indeed, a source of constant annoyance and wonder to him; for, quite apart from the defects which he detected in the capacity of the officers who were called upon to work the system, he was for ever discovering fresh absurdities in the system itself.

"A curious feature of military administration came before me the other day. It appears that a report is submitted once every year upon every staff officer in the British and Native army. If the report is unfavourable, it has to be shown to the individual criticised; otherwise it is passed on to Headquarters. The consequence is that the reports are a stream of fulsome and almost ludicrous panegyric. I must have looked through the accounts of at least 200 or 250 officers;

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, October 4th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., September 27th, 1899.

## WANTED : A COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

every one of them was smart, zealous, intelligent and capable, fitted to fill any position to which he might be called. Anyhow, to judge from what I read, our army must be officered entirely by Moltkes and Wellingtons.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon’s hope that the question of Sir William Lockhart’s successor might be settled at an early date, so that a start might be made with the much-needed reforms, was doomed to disappointment. The permanent appointment rested with the Government at home ; and the British Cabinet was far too fully occupied with its own military troubles to pay much attention to those further away. Not until the end of June did the Cabinet discuss the matter, and not until the end of July did it decide upon an appointment. “I do not know when the appointment will be gazetted,” wrote Lord George Hamilton, on July the 27th, “so keep it very quiet.” This last request proved to be very necessary, for on August the 2nd the Secretary of State had a different story to tell. Having agreed upon their choice, “the Cabinet at a subsequent meeting decided to annul that decision and leave the whole question in abeyance.” No wonder that Lord Curzon was moved to exclaim, “What very funny people the Cabinet are !” He would probably have employed a more forcible epithet, could he have foreseen that another two years and more were to elapse before the new Commander-in-Chief was to reach India. In the meantime Sir Power Palmer continued to discharge the duties of the office. He did so in an acting capacity for a year ; and when he represented the anomaly and unfairness of an acting appointment indefinitely prolonged, he was confirmed temporarily in the post at first until the spring of 1902 and later until November of the same year.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, August 23rd, 1899.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

MARCH AND APRIL 1900

LORD CURZON looked forward eagerly to his projected tour of the North West Frontier. His scheme for holding the advanced posts with local levies had not been making as rapid progress as he had hoped, and he was anxious to get into touch with the authorities on the spot with a view to hastening matters. He was also determined to take up the question of the future political and administrative control of the frontier as soon as he was settled at Simla, and hoped to derive great help from personal discussion with officers with practical experience of the actual conditions of work under the existing system. He hoped, too, to enlist the interest of the traders at Quetta in the new route which was being opened up between that city and Sistan via Nushki, the construction of which he had advocated so strongly when, as a traveller, he had written of Persia and the Russian menace to India. Last, but not least, he had been seriously perturbed by the number of murderous outrages against Europeans which had recently been recorded, and had made up his mind to convey to the tribal chiefs a solemn and impressive warning.

But, before the time came for leaving the capital, he found reason for making a personal visit to a very different part of the country. There was on the north-eastern confines of the continent a province hitherto unvisited by any Viceroy, with the single exception of Lord Northbrook ; apt, therefore, to regard itself as the Cinderella of the provinces and to complain of official indifference to its laudable

## NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

endeavours to develop its undeniable resources. Unwonted activity on its borders had attracted the Viceroy's vigilant eye. It had, in fact, been enjoying, on a small scale, a frontier problem of its own, due to a growing disposition on the part of the members of a wild tribe called the Bebejiya Mishmis to raid across its borders. Having been assured that there would be no risk, and great results, that the murderers of British subjects would be easily arrested and salutary lessons taught them and, further, that much valuable information about a little known country would be collected, Lord Curzon had sometime before sanctioned, though a little reluctantly, the despatch of a punitive expedition. It had now returned "after an absolutely bootless though costly excursion, with no result whatsoever but the capture of two inoffensive and worthless prisoners."<sup>1</sup> The Viceroy decided to see things for himself. "At the beginning of March I contemplate making a short tour in Assam," he informed the Secretary of State.

A month later he wrote from "a jogging train on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river," giving his impressions of the country.

"Assam is a very peculiar province. It possesses a vast amount of uncultivated and all but uncultivable land; a community of English planters who are a vigorous and enterprising body of men . . . animated by an intense suspicion of Government and all its works; a native population that remains quite stationary, if it does not recede, and requires to be supplemented for any form of agricultural or industrial exploitation by imported labour; a malarial and decimating climate; and a Chief Commissioner who wants to make a great name by developing his province regardless of expense in all sorts of ways, impossible as well as possible. Here, as you will see, are all the elements of a rather complex situation that requires cautious handling by a Viceroy on tour."<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his visit he penetrated as far as Dibrugarh, near the Mishmi border, and confirmed by personal enquiry the doubts he had entertained about the Mishmi expedition. He satisfied him-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, February 22nd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., March 11th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

self that all that had been called for was a punitive foray by the border police.

"Lockhart turned it into a military expedition. I managed to prevent him sending a naval detachment with rockets. But the soldiers, once they got hold of the matter, turned it into a military expedition on a large scale—over 600 men, 27 officers, 6 doctors, 86 sappers and miners with dynamite, gun cotton and wire rope, and 2,000 coolies. When they got into the pass entering into the Mishmi country, it was found to be quite impossible to get this great force over, and all but 120 soldiers, 8 officers and 300 coolies were sent back, to remain hanging about on the border in receipt of campaign pay, until the expedition was over. . . . You may be sure that there will be some very plain speaking on my part when the final reports are submitted and when the bill—estimated at several lakhs of rupees—comes in."<sup>1</sup>

On account of the views which he held of the necessity for a definite policy to check the advance of Russia towards India *via* Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet, Lord Curzon has often been depicted as a prancing pro-consul afflicted with acute territorial megalomania. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the North West Frontier and the North East Frontier alike he was constantly vetoing proposals for advances across the borders and reducing commitments urged on him by his military advisers. He deprecated activity on the Burma-China frontier, and was constantly impressing this on the Lieutenant Governor. Yet hard on the failure of the expedition against the Mishmis came news of an attack on an Anglo-Chinese Frontier Commission by a party of Was on one part of the border and of a demonstration by a party of Chinese against a British survey party in another. "What this expedition is doing I do not exactly know. It is, I believe, in the country into which Fryer wished to send, but I declined to authorise, a military expedition last summer. My whole object has been to do nothing on that frontier at all, and I have impressed this over and over again on the Lieutenant Governor."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 11th, 1900.      <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, February 22nd, 1900.

## NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

On March the 28th he left Calcutta for the United Provinces, where he spent a week in camp, shooting and recuperating after the Calcutta season, and then went on to Quetta, spending a day of "official routine and pageantry" at Amritza on the way.

April in India is a torrid month ; and the contrast between the comparative verdure of the Terai jungle, which stretches like a ribbon along the foot of the Himalaya mountains, and the staring nakedness of the plains beyond, is an abrupt one. Travel at this season is accompanied by sore discomfort. As he was borne across some of the most arid tracts in India, in the direction of the mountain bastions of Baluchistan, the Viceroy found it so. "It is oppressively sultry. We pass for hours through an abominable desert, whose surface is obscured by clouds of grey dust that pour into the carriage and cover everything with a thick layer of sand. And through this the Indian train hour after hour jogs and rattles its usual way, the noisiest, clumsiest, most uninviting method of locomotion in the world."<sup>1</sup>

Those who think of an Indian Viceroy as a pampered autocrat living in the lap of luxury know nothing of the strain which life and work in India impose upon the physical organism. To some extent the discomfort can be mitigated ; but the discomfort of the moment, though the most apparent, is by no means the most important of the evils for which the Indian climate is responsible. Lord Morley once admitted that he was haunted by the thought of Lady Minto crossing the plains of India in a railway carriage with the thermometer at 119. "How terrific!" he wrote to the Viceroy of that day, "one half day of such a Tophet would destroy me." And musing upon the matter he recalled a remark once made by Sir Henry Maine, that British rule in India would be better if it were not so hot—for there was a physical pressure upon the nerves. Lord Morley took due note of this and similar expressions by men who were in a position to know, and was willing enough to attribute to such pressure Anglo-Indian sensitiveness to attack and its addiction to polemics in long-winded notes and other forms of controversy.<sup>2</sup> If the cold weather visitor and the armchair critic of British rule in

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, dated April 10th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Viscount Morley's "Recollections," Vol. II, p. 261.

## CURZON, 1900

India were equally ready to take into account the climatic conditions under which the work of administration is carried on, they would arrive at a juster estimate than they sometimes do of Britain's achievement in the East.

Lord Curzon never permitted external conditions to interfere with his normal time table of work. And it can hardly be supposed that the long hours of concentrated labour to which he subjected himself can have been altogether without effect on his system. As time went on the old weakness in his back gave increasingly frequent warning. "I have had some return of my back trouble from overwork," he told Sir Schomberg McDonnell in July of this year, and a little later he wrote, "Considering my weak back, it is wonderful what I get through."<sup>1</sup> To those who were serving immediately under him it was, indeed, astonishing. I recall occasions during the summer of 1900 when he was compelled to spend whole days in bed. But work never ceased, and it became a half humorous complaint in the secretariat that the Viceroy's output of work during a day's prostration was apt to exceed the normal. A year later the toll which work in India was taking of him was still more marked. "I have been ill for a long time, but am slowly mending," he told Ian Malcolm in the autumn of 1901.<sup>2</sup>

But quite apart from these plain indications of strain, a close observer might have noticed here and there signs of the fraying of the nerves of which Sir Henry Maine had spoken. His comments on men and matters tended to become more incisive. The humour was still there, but it took on a sharper edge; there seemed to be less of geniality and more of impatience in his sallies. Of one of the highest officials in India he wrote in a moment of irritation some time after he had himself assumed office—"A man who cannot write a letter without some error of syntax, spelling or construction cannot be fit to control a great administration"; and of another of whose ability he held a high opinion—"The rage and the loathing which he appears to excite in those who are beneath him almost exceed description." He was likewise beginning to show something of the sensitiveness of which Lord Morley spoke later, not merely

<sup>1</sup>Letters dated July 25th, and October 31st, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated October 30th, 1901.

## NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

to attack, but to any disagreement with his own opinions. "To speak frankly," he told Sir A. Godley, with reference to a Despatch from the India Office, dissenting from the views which had been put forward by the Government of India on the subject of certain uncovenanted service family pension funds, "we were rather disgusted with your reply, which made no attempt to answer our arguments or to consider our recommendations. . . . Am I justified in detecting in this somewhat inartistic and peremptory rejoinder the bovine hoof of A—?" A little later he was commenting scathingly on the attitude of one of his own political officers at the court of a Native State—"B— takes immense credit to himself for these and any other successes, and writes to us in a tone of bouncing complacency that would shame a football." And in the same letter, written under the burning rays of the sun that smote fiercely down on the stark aridity of Sind as he travelled wearily across it, he complained acidly of the delay with which he had been obliged to put up in addressing the India Office on a matter to which he attached importance, owing to the irritating dilatoriness of the official primarily concerned—"Already it has been delayed six months by the interminable niggling of C—. He went on writing, writing, writing as he always does, disputatious but agile, clever but exasperating. . . . He is the regular old-fashioned official against any innovation, caring not one little damn for reform, and convinced that Government business should be conducted with all the forms and at the speed of a minuet."

The tendency noticeable thus early in his term of office increased as time went on. It had no appreciable effect as yet upon his normally buoyant spirits. During the summer of 1900 there were occasional days of gloom, when a meal would be gone through in depressing silence on the part of the Viceroy and subdued conversation on the part of the staff; but such days were exceptional. For the most part, in 1900 his exuberant animal spirits were as conspicuous as before.

His tour of the frontier, despite the heat and dust and frequent discomfort, was an unqualified success. In reply to an Address from the Quetta municipality he was able to tell his audience that he was now visiting their city for the third time and that, having known it

## CURZON, 1900

first under the virile rule of Sir Robert Sandeman and later under that of Sir James Brown, a notable figure in frontier history, no one could realise more fully or regard with a more interested eye the part it was destined to play in the political, strategical and commercial development of the frontier. He assured them of his interest in the Nushki route and of his determination to spare no effort to make it a success.

On the following day he addressed a great Durbar of the Chiefs, Sirdars and other native gentlemen of Baluchistan, and after some preliminary remarks, in the course of which he declared that in former years he had met most of the tribes and made the acquaintance of the principal Chieftans along a thousand miles of frontier from the Pamirs to Quetta, he indulged in some plain speaking to the various groups assembled to hear him. The Khan of Kelat was reminded that among his ancestors was Nadir Khan the First, "who was beloved as a just and upright ruler"; and he was pointedly exhorted to remember that "the example of great ancestors should never be forgotten by their descendants." Both the Sirdars of the Baluch Confederacy and those of the districts under British administration were charged to bear constantly in mind their responsibility for checking lawlessness among their people. There had recently taken place within their territories a number of murderous attacks upon Englishmen attributed to outbreaks of Ghazism. The idea that any one could earn the favour of Almighty God by murdering the adherents of other faiths was one of the stupidest notions that had ever entered into the mind of man. "If we could lift the *purdah* of the future world and see what fate has attended these wretched murderers, I do not think there would be many future Ghazis on the Pathan border or in Baluchistan." However, since the *purdah* of the future world was not easily lifted, he would content himself with making clear the attitude of his own Government towards these crimes, about which he desired that they should cherish no illusions. He would shrink from no punishment however severe; and, if satisfied of the necessity of such a course, he would not hesitate to prohibit the carrying of all arms amongst the tribes over whom he exercised any sort of jurisdiction.

The speech created a profound sensation: It was at once realised

## NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

that here was something differing markedly from the barren courtesies usually exchanged between host and guests on such occasions. The Address itself had been translated into Pushtu, and at the end of the proceedings copies of it were distributed among the Durbaris. But the whole assembly was as much impressed by the manner of its delivery as by the matter which it contained. "Speaking for half an hour without a single gesture or movement of the body, Lord Curzon held his audience—even the Baluchis, who could not understand a word—spellbound. Not a sound broke the stillness of the hall; the Durbaris and the European spectators might all have been sculptured figures in stone."<sup>1</sup>

All who read it were equally impressed by its matter. It excited immediate comment in the English press throughout India. Comment, generally, was marked by a recognition of the advantage which Lord Curzon enjoyed by reason of his personal acquaintance with the frontier and its tribes, and by admiration for the courage and independence of spirit which enabled him to break through the restraints of Viceregal custom. Belief was expressed in the sincerity both of his promises and his warnings. "What Lord Curzon says he means," was the simple but significant sentence with which a leader writer in the chief English newspaper in Calcutta brought a long and appreciative article on the Durbar speech to a close.

These comments in the press of India found echoes in the newspapers of Great Britain, a possibility which the Viceroy had perhaps foreseen, for he wrote a letter to the Secretary of State, setting forth the reasons for his plain speaking. "The meanest figure in the whole assembly was the Khan himself, who is a *roi faineant*, indifferent to public affairs, seldom emerging from his *miri* or fort at Kelat and notoriously stingy." And with regard to his sermon to the Sirdars—"I spoke to the Chiefs with a frankness and seriousness about Ghazism and frontier crime which took them very much by surprise and were quite foreign to the usual Viceregal allocution. However, I have too much real business to say to find time for platitudes, and public opinion backs me up very strongly in opening the Government windows and letting people see and know clearly what we think inside."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A correspondent in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, April 17th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated April 11th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

From Quetta Lady Curzon proceeded to Simla and the Viceroy to Dera Ghazi Khan and Bannu, whence he covered the distance of fifty miles to Kohat by road. Everywhere he went he discussed outstanding points of frontier policy and administration with the frontier officers whom he met, and on all sides he found support in the battle which he was fighting with the authorities at Head-Quarters against elaborate fortifications and extravagant commitments. "I find that all these wonderful forts with steel shutters and machicolis galleries and impregnable keeps which the military engineers are always thrusting upon me are ridiculed by the local people"; and the same applied to the extravagant estimates running from five to six lakhs, submitted to him for the conversion of the track over the Kohat pass to a road for wheeled traffic. "Everyone from the General Commanding down to the civil engineer agrees that the proposals of the Punjab Government are fantastic and superfluous."<sup>1</sup>

On main principles he found few who were any longer prepared to say a word "for the policy that landed us in Wana and the Tochi." Wherever he went he found fresh reasons for the change in the administrative control of the frontier, towards which he had for sometime past been steadily moving. "Of course all these experiences emphasize the necessity for more direct contact between the Government of India and the frontier. It is largely owing to the intervening barrier of a Local Government, ignorant itself and allowing but little independence of utterance or action to its local officers, that these mistakes occur. Slowly but surely the outlines of an inevitable reconstruction are shaping themselves in my mind."<sup>2</sup>

The tangle, into which the scheme for holding posts with a frontier militia had got, was quickly unravelled. With his own pen the Viceroy, after consultation with everyone concerned from the Lieutenant Governor downwards, cut down the number of battalions proposed from four to two and erased from the programme a whole series of new posts which it was proposed to establish "in the very country from which I desire to withdraw." He regarded this

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 23rd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, April 23rd, 1900.

## NORTH EAST AND NORTH WEST FRONTIERS

decision as the most beneficial outcome of his tour. "We shall save lakhs of rupees and attain all that we desire. . . . It is an awful labour having to do all these things oneself; but I am bent upon making this new policy a success and the only way is to supervise and control and direct at every step."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, April 23rd, 1900.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

APRIL 1900—NOVEMBER 1901

WHEN Lord Curzon reached Simla at the end of April there seemed to be every prospect of a quiet summer, and he looked forward with undiminished zeal to grappling with the various questions which awaited examination. Suggestions from his friends in England—that, had he cared to avail himself of them, he would have found great opportunities open to him at home—left him unmoved. “ You kindly express some regret that I am not in England now and in the Government. I honestly do not share that feeling,” he told Sir A. Godley. “ If I were at home I should still be only Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. . . . Here I believe that, at the price of what is called exile and possibly of future chances at home, I can do a considerable work for the Empire. If I do nothing more in my life but that I shall not be dissatisfied.”<sup>1</sup> And he loyally joined issue with those who insinuated that the energy and courage with which they credited him was sorely lacking in the leadership of the nation at home.

“ Balfour has elevated political nonchalance to the dignity of a fine art,” he told Mrs. Craigie. “ But it is largely superficial, and behind it all he is as patriotic and as capable of strenuous—though not detailed—work as any man. I should have been of no use had I been at home now. I should still have been an underling, still Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. As such no one would have wanted to hear

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 5th, 1900.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

me on South Africa. But here on the other hand, I am doing a great work which will leave its mark. Begin to turn your thoughts to the East—to the Ancient of Days. The atmosphere here is larger and the sense of duty, which is the cement of Empire, more overpowering.”<sup>1</sup>

For some weeks the promise of an uneventful summer seemed likely to be fulfilled. “Life here,” he told Lord Salisbury on June the 7th, “is sufficiently monotonous and the work as undeviating as Tennyson’s ‘Brook.’” Later in the summer, however, history showed a curious, and, to the Viceroy, an exasperating tendency to repeat itself. Just as during the preceding summer, he had been faced with a sudden demand for troops for South Africa, so before the summer of 1900 was half way through, he was called upon to equip and despatch an expeditionary force to assist in coping with an altogether unexpected crisis in China. And as the summer wore on and no sign of the eagerly awaited monsoon was to be seen, he was chilled with the fear of a second year of famine more grievous even than that through which the land had just passed. His letters home became coloured with gloomy forebodings for the future. “For all I know I may be guiding India through a second consecutive famine year, a thing which would be unparalleled in horror and unprecedented in history. That is if the rains do not come—already they are three weeks late and this whole mountain top is wrapt up in a smoke of white dust.”<sup>2</sup>

No one knew better than the Secretary of State how much to heart the Viceroy took these unforeseen interventions of a malevolent Fate, and he wrote him words of warm sympathy.

“It is very hard upon you, when you have so many great reforms and improvements in hand, that you should in addition have thrown upon your shoulders the responsibility of the biggest famine and its concomitant evils which has occurred in the present century. We all admire the courage and assiduity with which you are taking up question after question and the high tone and standard which you are endeavouring

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 12th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Mr., afterwards Sir Ian, Malcolm, dated July 4th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

to infuse into those with whom you are working and into Indian officialdom generally."

The Viceroy responded readily to such recognition of his work.

"Your letter of the 15th of June which reached me two days ago, is full of a generous encouragement and appreciation for which I am more than grateful. No cart-horse between the shafts assuredly works harder than I ; but even the cart horse at the end of his day's journey likes the bunch of grass or the carrot that is handed to him by a sympathetic master. . . . It is, as you say, a great disappointment to me to be switched off from all the various reforms that I desire to institute by the unforeseen and unavoidable stress of such phenomena as famine, pestilence and war ; but I must hope that my first two years will not be a model for those that succeed them, and that in quieter times I may be able to make the progress that I desire."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless Lord Curzon profited by the lack of incident which characterised the first few weeks of the Simla season, and cleared the decks for the big question of the hour, which he was now determined to settle once for all. "The future of Punjab administration will *really* be my first big job when I get back to Simla," he had told the Secretary of State in his letter of March the 11th. Yet, no sooner had he carried through his tour of the North West Frontier which was to enable him to complete by personal enquiry and observation the study of the problem which he had long been making, than he received an urgent request from the Government at home for his considered views on a recent declaration by the Russian Government on the subject of its relations with Afghanistan.

Some weeks earlier Lord Salisbury had received from the Russian Government what Lord Curzon had described as "a remarkable, though somewhat ambiguous communication," which seemed to point to the establishment of direct relations with the Amir of Afghanistan at Kabul. The Russian Government disclaimed any intention of departing from the pledge, repeatedly given, that Afghanistan lay

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, July 4th, 1900.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

outside their sphere of action. The march of events, however, had made direct intercourse between Russian and Afghan officials inevitable. With a long coterminous frontier and the growth of commerce consequent on the completion of the Trans-Caspian Railway and its branches, it was no longer convenient to refer questions of a non-political nature to the British Government ; and the Imperial Russian Government considered it their duty, therefore, to inform Her Majesty's Government that they regarded the re-establishment of direct frontier relations as indispensable. To this statement Lord Salisbury asked for a detailed reply from the Government of India, and the Viceroy promised to set to work on one immediately on reaching Simla.

He soon found ample material for his pen, for, besides his Despatch to the Home Government, he felt obliged to reply to letters which came pouring in from the Amir himself, drawing attention in tones of much greater concern than before, to Russian activity across the border. "I am busily engaged upon a series of letters and Despatches touching the Amir and the Russians," he told the Secretary of State on May the 9th. "All these are documents of some importance and I am writing them myself as I have nobody else to whom to entrust the task." And a week later—"I hail with relief a short respite from the dubious pleasures of authorship, having just despatched by the present mail my three compositions relating to Russia and Afghanistan. . . I hope you will think that I have succeeded in making out an overpowering case against the Russian agent at Kabul."

There is evidence to show that in England there was, at this time, a disposition on the part of those chiefly concerned to contemplate a line of policy towards Russia, which would have been regarded by the Viceroy as rank heresy. On receipt of the Russian memorandum Sir Arthur Godley had written—"If we are, as appears likely, going to agree to the proposal sooner or later, I hope (1) that it will be made the occasion of getting a general understanding with Russia for which the wording of the memorandum gives a good opportunity ; and (2) that we should not begin by protesting and saying disagreeable things and then end by backing down."<sup>1</sup> In a letter

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated February 8th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

written on February the 16th, Lord George Hamilton had uttered thoughts even more startlingly heretical—"The policy of maintaining a weak buffer state between two strong Empires was an experiment made many years ago, and it certainly has not proved a success either in Afghanistan or Persia. . . . I look forward to the day when the frontiers of Great Britain and Russia may be coterminous, . . ." Such views, however, were still in embryo and, on the specific point at issue, the Viceroy's arguments carried complete conviction. "I must congratulate you on your Kabul Despatch," wrote the Secretary of State on June the 15th. "It is admirable in its tone, its argument and its conclusions. The objections to a Russian agent at Kabul are, as you say, insuperable, and to that point we must adhere."

The opportunity for drafting his proposals for solving the problem of frontier administration seemed at last to have arrived. Yet this task was to undergo yet one more postponement. "My next big job upon which I have already started (again for a short time postponing the frontier) is the question upon which you spoke to me before leaving England, and upon which the Queen has written to me several times since, of providing somehow increased opportunities for the military aspirations of Indian gentlemen and princes."<sup>1</sup> The project was, in fact, one in which Queen Victoria took a keen personal interest; and her clearly expressed wish that the Viceroy should lend it the great weight of his authority, caused him to embark on it without further delay. "If the Viceroy were to urge this, and recommend this, it would doubtless lead to its being carried out."<sup>2</sup> Moreover he realised that the great outburst of loyalty, particularly among the Indian princes, which had been evoked by the war in South Africa, rendered the time opportune for making the attempt. And he accordingly concentrated on it, with the intention of formulating a scheme which could be put into early operation. By the beginning of June he was able to inform the Secretary of State that his proposals were in print; and, when forwarding them the following month, he asked that, if approved by the Cabinet, he might be so informed as early as possible, in order

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 16th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Queen Victoria to the Viceroy, April 12th, 1900.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

that he might take the necessary preliminary steps for launching the scheme before he started on his autumn tour.

The scheme which he propounded was a modest one, framed with the caution which experience had shown to be necessary in dealing with an innovation which was viewed with anything but enthusiasm in military circles in England. A course at Sandhurst which had already been frowned at by the War Office was, for that reason, put aside and played no part, consequently, in Lord Curzon's proposals. Briefly put, his scheme was the creation of an Imperial Cadet Corps of strictly limited numbers, to be recruited from the Indian aristocracy receiving their education at the four Chief's colleges which were already in existence. A two years course of training, during which the probationers would be in personal attendance upon the Viceroy from time to time, was to be followed by a more rigorous military course of a year for those who survived the test of the first two years. Those who emerged successfully from this final test would be eligible for the rank and status of a British officer, in staff or other extra-regimental military employment.

The Secretary of State's reception of the scheme was all that the Viceroy could have desired—"I have read very carefully your exhaustive Minute on the question of giving commissions to native gentlemen. . . . I do admire your incomparable assiduity and industry, which I do not think I have ever seen equalled, considering how many questions of importance you have to deal with at the same time. I think the leading principle of your proposal is excellent. . . . I will try and send you as soon as possible our views upon your proposal."<sup>1</sup> But he had underestimated the dead weight of resistance to change which prejudice was able to put up; and even this modest beginning met with such opposition, that it was not until a year later that a draft Despatch, accepting with some modifications the Viceroy's proposals, eventually survived the ordeal of criticism in the Cabinet and the India Council. A great deal had happened in the meantime. A General Election had taken place, and the Conservative party had again been returned to power; Queen Victoria had passed away and King Edward reigned in her stead. He was as keenly interested in the project as his predecessor, and, on the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Viceroy, August 15th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

publication of the scheme, he caused it to be made known that it was one which carried with it his cordial approval, and that he desired it to be understood that he welcomed this opportunity of testifying his confidence in the loyalty of his Indian feudatories and subjects, in the opening year of his reign.

The Viceroy's annoyance at the enforced delay in approving his project must have been mitigated by the reception which it met with at the hands of the public; though one imagines that he may have indulged in a wry smile, when he read in a Canadian newspaper that his "latest original and courageous proposal" had been "immediately sanctioned by the British Cabinet."<sup>1</sup> Opinion in India, as represented by the European press, was that, by his policy in the matter, he had possibly done more to consolidate the Indian Empire than any of his predecessors since John Lawrence;<sup>2</sup> while it was described in England as one of the happiest strokes of his policy, which was bound to have an immense influence for good in the States and Provinces of India.<sup>3</sup>

The long hours of work which he had devoted to this and other matters during the early part of the summer of 1900, coming as they did on top of the heavy Calcutta season and two exhausting tours, were not without their effect on the Viceroy's health. "I have been a good deal overworked lately," he told the Secretary of State on May the 30th, "and have been suffering some pain and uneasiness from my old enemy—a weak back." And, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to move, he sought a change of scene—though not of occupation—in the mountains, a day's march from Simla.

"I am writing in manuscript, since I am away from Simla, having come out to a charming spot in the mountains, in sight of Viceregal Lodge, though 16 miles distant, where my camp is pitched under a grove of deodars on the top of a hill with the Sutlej humming in a deep gorge between 3,000 and 4,000 feet below. I have come out here to recover from the terrible sleeplessness following upon back-pain from which I have lately been suffering, but which, I am glad to say, is

<sup>1</sup>*The Montreal Star*, August 31st, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>*The Englishman*, July 20th, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>*The Pall Mall Gazette*, July 19th, 1900.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

slowly ceding to the healthy influence of these fresh and lovely surroundings."<sup>1</sup>

I happened to be in camp with him under the deodars of Naldera, and on this, as on various other occasions, I had striking ocular proof of the indomitable courage of the man.

Throughout July the fate of large tracts of agricultural India hung in the balance. The monsoon, which had given a fair amount of rain during the first half of the month, weakened seriously towards the end of it; and on July the 24th the Viceroy felt obliged to warn the Secretary of State by cable of the gravity of the situation. He informed him at the same time of his intention of visiting the worst districts in Guzerat, in order that he might see for himself how matters stood. On July the 30th he left Simla for the threatened areas. By a curious and most fortunate coincidence his visits to the various centres were accompanied by a revival of the monsoon, and from this moment the disaster with which India was threatened was averted. In a letter to Lady Curzon he described his arrival at the first of the stricken districts which he had arranged to visit.

"Called at 6 a.m. at Dohad. Out 6.40 in riding breeches and boots. Innumerable steeds, on to which we all climbed and started in steady drizzle for big relief works three miles away. Soon the drizzle became a downpour which nothing could resist, and when we reached the tank we wallowed about in an ocean of mud. It was too wet for the poor people to work or do anything and they were all dismissed for the day."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the tour the Viceroy's progress was marked by coincidences which could not fail to make a profound impression upon an illiterate and superstitious people. A river which he had to cross and which was spanned only by a low level bridge fell on his arrival to a point sufficiently low to enable him to be conveyed across by rail, remained at the same level for a week, allowing him to return by rail, and then rose rapidly the following day and cut all railway communication for three weeks.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 13th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated August 3rd, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

The tour, though of brief duration, was an exhausting one. "I was literally too tired to sleep," he told Lady Curzon on his arrival at Baroda, "and could only lie in bed and do nothing." The same evening after dinner he retired to grapple with more work—"and then had vile and sleepless night."<sup>1</sup> And, in a letter to the Secretary of State on his return to Simla, he summed up his experiences as follows—"I have just returned from my ten days famine trip, and as I am very tired, having spent five out of the last nine nights in the railway carriage (where I seldom sleep at all), having been up every morning between six and seven and having spent many hours of each day in inspection of relief works, famine camps, hospitals and so on, you must pardon me if I send you rather a short and perfunctory letter."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in spite of the full and exhausting nature of the trip he found time and energy to stop at Agra on his way back "to see about the replanting of the cypresses in the garden of the Taj," and at Ali-garh "to visit poor Beck's college."<sup>3</sup> And, most remarkable of all during these strenuous days, he found the time, which he had failed to do in his study chair at Simla, to make rapid progress with his scheme for the better control of the North West Frontier. A few days before starting on his tour he had told Sir Arthur Godley that, for a month past, he had not found a moment to devote to it. "The box and the papers are at my side. I work daily till beyond midnight. Yet during the whole of this time I have never once found half an hour within which to open it and continue the work."<sup>4</sup> In his letter to the Secretary of State, at the conclusion of his famine inspection, he was able to tell a different story. "In the intervals of my famine tour, while in the train and elsewhere, I have been very hard at work on my Punjab Frontier scheme."<sup>5</sup> It was the case of the Lothian Prize Essay over again, though the circumstances can have been still less favourable to sustained and careful work than on that famous occasion;<sup>6</sup> and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the problem of the Frontier had claimed a large proportion of the weary hours of darkness, when sleep refused to respond either

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 3rd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., August 8th, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, August 3rd, 1900.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., August 8th, 1900.

<sup>5</sup>Letter dated July 18th, 1900.

<sup>6</sup>See Vol. I, chapter IV, page 89.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

to entreaty or command. That he had not willingly abandoned his efforts to woo her is clear from a sentence in his letter to Lady Curzon, in which he spoke of his medical officer contending cheerfully with the discomforts of the journey, "and supplying me with the most futile drugs."

In an earlier chapter reference has been made to the active interest which the Viceroy-designate took in a Despatch dealing with the future control of the Frontier, upon which the Secretary of State was then engaged. In the Despatch as originally drafted, the Home Government had declared definitely against the separation of the Trans-Indus districts from the Punjab, and had decided that the Commissioner of Peshawar, while remaining under the Punjab Government and taking his orders from that Government in all matters of ordinary administration, should act directly under the Government of India in his dealings with the tribes beyond the administrative border. The Viceroy-designate, with his personal knowledge of the Frontier, had been very doubtful of the wisdom of this decision, and had explained his objections to it verbally and in writing. He had concluded by begging that he and his future colleagues might, at least, be given the opportunity of reporting on the proposal, before it was finally put into operation. His representations had been successful. In the Despatch as finally drafted the objections to the creation of a separate Frontier Province were stated, but no decision on the point was given. The suggestion for placing the Commissioner of Peshawar under the dual control of the Government of India and the Government of the Punjab was made, but not insisted on; the original wording—"Her Majesty's Government hold"—was replaced by the much less dogmatic assertion—"I am inclined to hold"; and the opinion of the Government of India on the proposal was specifically invited. The views of the Home Government on the problem were in fact—as the Viceroy-designate had told Mrs. Curzon at the time—"put in a much more tentative way."<sup>1</sup>

A very short experience of the actual working of the system, under which frontier affairs were administered by the Punjab Government, had sufficed to convince the Viceroy that what was

<sup>1</sup>See Vol. I, p. 301.

## CURZON, 1900

required was a much more drastic change than that suggested by the Secretary of State in the Despatch of August the 5th, 1898. And the solution of the problem, which he advocated in an elaborate Minute covering twenty-seven pages of print, was the one which he had sketched in a few sentences in his letter to the Secretary of State more than a year before.<sup>1</sup> His whole experience since that date had tended to confirm him in the view which he had then formed, that no solution which fell short of the elimination of the Local Government would suffice. "Remember this, too," he told Lord Selborne in a letter written on April the 9th 1900, "that the Government of India, realising its own ignorance, but not realising that it was duplicating the danger, has placed, between itself and the Frontier, the Punjab Government, which often knows even less and which has for twenty years been an instrument of procrastination and obstruction and weakness. I hope that one of the great reforms of my time will be the removal of this obstacle."

Scarcely a week had passed without producing some fresh cause for exasperation in the conduct of Frontier affairs. Before leaving Simla the previous autumn Lord Curzon had set forth his views on certain questions of frontier policy in an official letter to the Punjab Government, and, in order to make sure that he had been fully understood, had gone over the ground in conversation with the Lieutenant-Governor. "I told him precisely what I felt: and the matter was, I thought, closed."<sup>2</sup> Yet the latter had replied after an interval with "a long and disputatious argument," which had driven the Viceroy to despair. "I cannot work a Government under this system," he had told the Secretary of State. "I cannot spend hours in wordy argument with my Lieutenant-Governors as to the exact meaning, purport, scope, object, character, possible limitations, conceivable results of each petty aspect of my Frontier policy. If they deliberately refuse to understand it and haggle and boggle about carrying it out, I must get some fairly intelligent officer who will understand what I mean and do what I say."<sup>3</sup>

The Minute in which he set forth his conclusions and recommen-

<sup>1</sup>See back, chapter III, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, November 16th, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

dations provides an admirable example of the peculiar ability, with which he habitually presented and argued a case. The history of the past was probed and laid bare ; the facts of the existing situation were sifted and marshalled. The chain of argument was carried with unanswerable logic, step by step to its inevitable conclusion. Objections were considered and met. He pointed to the fact that, for many years past, the anomalies of the position had been recognised by a long succession of those best qualified to form an opinion. As far back as 1877 the Secretary of State had declared that the circumstances in which the frontier had been given to the Punjab were obsolete. With unerring instinct he placed his finger on the weak points in previous schemes, which had invariably prevented them from materialising. The grandiose project of Lord Lytton, who aimed at creating a huge frontier province running from Hazara to the Indian Ocean, might still " appeal to the imagination of the enthusiast, but was not practicable in fact." Nevertheless, the time had come when the necessity for placing the actual frontier districts under the direct guidance and control of the Government of India could no longer be ignored.

In his Oxford days Lord Curzon had once boasted that he took a special delight in listening to a disputant, who was not too sure of his ground, arguing a case, and then, when he had committed himself beyond recall, bringing the heavy artillery of his own superior knowledge to bear upon him, and utterly demolishing him. Something of this spirit was usually to be detected in his Official Minutes and Despatches on controversial topics ; and, in his Minute on the Frontier problem he was determined to annihilate the pretensions of the Punjab Government to administer it. In terse and incisive phrases he summed up the case for change—

" I venture to affirm that there is not another country or Government in the world, which adopts a system so irrational in theory, so bizarre in practice, as to interpose between its Foreign Minister and his most important sphere of activity, the barrier, not of a subordinate official, but of a subordinate Government, on the mere geographical plea that the latter resides in closer proximity to the scene of action—a plea

## CURZON, 1900

which itself breaks down when it is remembered that for five months in the year the Supreme and the Local Governments are both located at the same spot, Simla."

He recalled the fact that the system in force had been reprobated "by all the greatest frontier authorities for the last quarter of a century." And he summed up concisely its inherent disadvantages—

"It attenuates without diminishing the ultimate responsibility of the Government of India. It protracts without strengthening their action. It interposes between the Foreign Minister of India and his subordinate agents, not an ambassador, or a minister, or a consul, but the elaborate mechanism of a Local Government and the necessarily exalted personality of a Lieutenant-Governor. Worked as the system has been with unfailing loyalty and with profound devotion to duty, it has yet been the source of friction, of divided counsels, of vacillation, of exaggerated centralisation, of interminable delay."

On September the 13th the Minute was forwarded to the Secretary of State, with a covering Despatch carrying the unanimous approval of the Government of India. "My Frontier scheme is finished and done at last," he told Sir A. Godley on September the 12th. "I feel like an Eton boy who has got through Trials. Be kind to it and help it on. It would break my heart if it were now to fall through." His anxiety was unnecessary. The soundness of its reasoning and of the conclusion arrived at was accepted by the Cabinet, who sanctioned the proposal in December, "as tending to express and enforce the direct responsibility of the Indian Government for frontier affairs, and to free the management of frontier politics from the delay inseparable from the present system." And in 1900 the North West Frontier Province, under a Chief Commissioner, came into being.

Lord Curzon had achieved what others had aimed at, but had failed to carry through. The necessity for the change was generally recognised, and his achievement met with almost universal applause.

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

Opinion generally was voiced by *The Times*, when it summed up the main object and effect of the change as being, "to put an end to a political anomaly which has come into existence in the most natural and inevitable way, but which has now reached dimensions that call for reform"; and, again, when it expressed the opinion that the new departure could not but conduce to "the firm and consistent management of our sometimes delicate relations on the North West Frontier."<sup>1</sup> Even more gratifying to the Viceroy than the widespread approval, evoked by the policy itself, must have been the commendation of his own courage and statesmanship, which was as marked in the case of those who were habitually opposed to him politically as in the case of his own friends and supporters. He once told Lord Selborne that he read *The Times* with care, and added, "I also sometimes look at the *Daily Chronicle*, usually to find myself abused." He must have been pleasantly surprised at what he read in the *Daily Chronicle* on the subject of his Frontier policy. For that paper declared that, as Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon was rapidly making himself a name which would stand high in the roll of the great Pro-Consuls of our Empire, and that, by evoking order out of chaos on our Indian border, he was doing work which was destined to endure.<sup>2</sup> And later, when the official papers on the subject were made public, the same organ asserted that the most interesting point in the whole mass of correspondence was the daring and self confidence displayed by Lord Curzon in entirely reversing his predecessor's policy with regard to the Frontier within a year of obtaining the Viceroyalty. The policy decided on, it asserted, promised great things; but almost as striking as the plan itself were the energy and self confidence displayed by the Viceroy in taking the whole onus of success or failure on his own shoulders.<sup>3</sup>

If I were compiling a mere chronicle of events, it might suffice if I were to conclude my mention of the crowning feature of Lord Curzon's frontier policy with a simple statement to the effect that details for giving application to the proposals which had received the sanction of the Home Government in December, 1900, were

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, February 15th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>*The Daily Chronicle*, February 14th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, March 9th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1900

successfully worked out during the succeeding months, and that the new Province came into actual being on the King's Birthday, November the 9th, 1901. But there can be few of the facts which stare at one coldly from the pages of history, which could not tell us, if they would, of the blood, or the sweat, or the tears of men which have gone to their fashioning before they found themselves finally, catalogued and docketed, on the dusty shelves of the historian. And, since the concern of the biographer is as much with the emotions as with the deeds of men, it seems necessary to refer to the storm of feeling amid which this, one of the outstanding achievements of a great Viceroyalty, was brought to fruition.

It must be admitted that Lord Curzon was curiously insensible to the effect which the process "of utterly demolishing an opponent" was likely to have on a sensitive nature. Had this not been so, he would assuredly have foreseen, and having foreseen would have endeavoured to guard against, the estrangement which his action—and more particularly the manner of it—was doomed to bring about in his relations with Sir Mackworth Young, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab.

The Lieutenant-Governor was, in the first place, extremely incensed at what he regarded as the Viceroy's studied affront, in refraining from taking him into his confidence before he submitted his proposals to the Secretary of State. Lord Curzon had, as a matter of fact, carefully considered the advisability of doing so, and had come to the conclusion that, in the special circumstances of the case, he was clearly not called upon to embark upon a course which he was satisfied would be tantamount to courting a futile controversy and much avoidable delay. He had contented himself, therefore, with a letter informing the Lieutenant-Governor privately, immediately after the despatch of his Minute to the Secretary of State, of the course which he was adopting, and of his intention, in the event of his proposals being sanctioned by the Cabinet, of taking him into full and immediate consultation concerning the constitution, area, limits, organisation and establishment of the new Administration. He concluded by saying that he was taking him into his confidence, before learning the decision of the Home Government on the matter, "partly because I remember saying to you at

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

Lahore last year that I would let you know at a later date the conclusions at which I had arrived; partly because I should regret nothing more than that you should feel, either now or in the future, that you had been taken unawares, or had been kept in the dark as to proposals so intimately affecting the Province over which you preside.”<sup>1</sup>

The Lieutenant-Governor’s reply to this tentative cirenicon was far from promising. He stated bluntly that it seemed to him to be “contrary to all usage, and experience,” that such a proposal should have been recommended to the Secretary of State, “without the Lieutenant-Governor of the time being in any way consulted.” He acknowledged the courteous tone of the Viceroy’s letter, the intention of which was no doubt “to sugar the pill,” but this he asserted could not alter “the painful fact that you have not cared to consult me about forming a new Administration out of the territory which I have received a commission from Her Majesty to administer. You could hardly have chosen a more forcible method of showing me what little confidence you repose in my judgment.”<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon deprecated most earnestly the inference drawn, that there was on his part any question of lack of confidence of the kind suggested. “Till I received your letter this personal aspect of the case never so much as entered my head; and I must beg of you to be so good as to dismiss it from yours.”<sup>3</sup> But the Lieutenant-Governor was not to be thus easily placated. “I think Your Excellency too readily supposes that I am actuated by mere personal feeling in this matter. I own to being disappointed that you have not thought it necessary to consult me. . . . but I am contending for an important principle and plead solely the official aspect of the case. . . . And I should fail in my duty if I did not point out what seems to me a flagrant breach of the constitutional method.”<sup>4</sup>

On January the 29th, 1901, Lord Curzon again wrote privately to Sir Mackworth Young, informing him of the decision of the Cabinet in favour of his proposals, and invoking his loyal and cordial assistance in carrying out the orders of His Majesty’s Government.

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon to Sir M. Young, September 16th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Sir M. Young to Lord Curzon, September 20th, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon to Sir M. Young, September 23rd, 1900.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Sir M. Young to Lord Curzon, September 26th, 1900.

In view of the resentment which the Lieutenant-Governor had already shown, he added some words of explanation with regard to his Minute, which was now submitted to him with other relevant papers for the first time. "I will only add that I trust you will not find anywhere in the papers submitted to you anything that is a source of personal annoyance to yourself. A man who is attacking a system is apt sometimes unconsciously to use words or phrases that may be obnoxious to the individual or individuals engaged in working the system. Certainly in the present case no such reflection was in my mind. I had to carry conviction to a jury many of whom (notably in the India Office) were once on the other side. I therefore stated my case strongly (for I feel it strongly), but I hope also without acerbity or exaggeration."

The difficulties in the way of amicable co-operation were, however, great. Lord Curzon had decided that the new Province was to be small, compact, and with an Administration that should not be top-heavy. He had selected for the post of Chief Commissioner, consequently, an officer of the Political Service, Major Deane, who, while possessing considerable experience of the Frontier, was many years junior to some of the Punjab officials who aspired to the post, and who regarded the appointment as tantamount to their own supercession. The publication in due course of the Viceroy's Minute added fuel to the fire of their indignation, and the language in which he had reviewed the working of the Punjab Government so deeply affected one officer of long service in the Province as to cause him to tender his resignation. Mr. H. Fanshawe as Commissioner of Delhi was not directly concerned with the controversy ; but he explained that, as an officer connected with the Punjab Administration, he felt that "a grave public indignity had been thrust on the Administration, as unmerited as it was ungenerous," and, since the Government under which he served was constrained to submit and the Province was silent, he felt called upon to make this sacrifice of his own service in vicarious vindication of their honour.

The incident naturally attracted a good deal of notice ; but Mr. Fanshawe's quixotic action met with little approval either in India or in Great Britain. The matter was referred to in the *Spectator* as "a

## A NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

very odd and, indeed, an unprecedented incident.”;<sup>1</sup> and, though it was urged in support of Mr. Fanshawe’s action, by a correspondent in its columns, that it was “the method of dismemberment and the language in which the Viceroy had reviewed the working of, and the workers of, the Punjab Government, rather than the dismemberment itself,” that justified such extreme resentment, the editor adhered to his opinion that this was not a case in which a public servant was justified in resigning because he disapproved of the policy which had been adopted.<sup>2</sup>

In such circumstances the necessary correspondence between the Viceroy and the Lieutenant-Governor, in connection with the preparation of a detailed scheme for giving effect to the new policy, was characterised by a forced restraint, which was not always proof against outbreaks of acerbity. And, before the scheme had attained its final form for despatch to the Secretary of State, the smouldering embers of the Lieutenant-Governor’s indignation burst into flame, in the fierce glare of which Mr. Fanshawe’s sensational resignation paled into insignificance.

Rumour of an intention on the part of the Viceroy to propose the removal of the Punjab Government from Simla to a hill station of its own, had reached the ears of the Lieutenant-Governor, who took occasion at a masonic banquet, at which he was a guest, to give vent to his pent up irritation in a speech which set the tongues of society in India wagging as they had seldom wagged before. Rumours of radical change, he declared, were in the air, and it was said that the Punjab Government had had orders to move itself to some other summer quarters. “In regard to this matter I can only say I have received no communication to this effect. I do not mean that this is any reason against such a possibility; but I presume we shall at all events have three months notice to quit.” The reason why the Punjab Government had originally been summoned to Simla, he went on to explain, was because the Viceroy of that day needed the advice of the Lieutenant-Governor on Frontier matters. “Perhaps advice is not so much needed at the present day. . . . I hope it may

<sup>1</sup>The *Spectator*, June 15th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>The *Spectator*, June 22nd, 1901. The correspondent was Mr. R. Fanshawe, a brother of the officer whose conduct was under discussion.

## CURZON, 1901

not be taken amiss if I say that a hill station where the full glare of the Supreme Government might be softened by distance would possess some fascinations for a Lieutenant-Governor and his hard worked satellites.”<sup>1</sup>

The Viceroy felt gravely affronted, and, though the Lieutenant-Governor realised the nature of the indiscretion of which he had been guilty, and subsequently wrote a letter containing tardy expressions of regret, the relations between the two men were never the same again. Lord Curzon was too proud to show in public how deeply he felt the breach—“I thought it better that I should remain under the imputation of a popular affront,” he told the Secretary of State, “rather than that the Viceroy should humiliate one of his Lieutenant-Governors before the world.” But it preyed upon his mind and added appreciably to the burden of his task. He had always entertained a high opinion of the Lieutenant-Governor’s character—he had written of him on one occasion as “one of the most honourable and high-minded of men, possessed of a high sense of duty and gifted with admirable manners”;<sup>2</sup> but he had never found him an easy man to work with. And, after the rift in their personal relations, he had confessed in a moment of depression, caused by a return of the pain in his back from which he so often suffered, that “his always lonely and during the past summer lonelier life” in Simla, had been “embittered and rendered miserable” by it.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, amid the pangs of an unusually painful delivery, did the North West Frontier Province come to birth.

<sup>1</sup>Speech made on June the 11th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, October 1st, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER IX

THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

OCTOBER—DECEMBER 1900

IN following the fortunes of Lord Curzon's Frontier policy we have been carried to the autumn of 1901; and we must now return to Simla in September 1900, when the Government of India first addressed the Secretary of State officially on the matter. The labours of the summer had been heavy, and as soon as the Despatch covering his Minute on the Frontier was safely signed he sought a brief respite from the strain of his daily administrative work. "I have been so hard worked during the whole of this summer," he told the Secretary of State, "and have had so little even in the shape of a few hours holiday, that after getting off this Despatch I am going for a fortnight's change of air with a little shooting thrown in, in the picturesque Hill State of Chumba, which lies to the North-West of here in the Himalayas. The holiday will, I hope, freshen me up both for the last three weeks of Simla work, which are always very arduous, and for the prolonged strain of the two months tour that will follow."<sup>1</sup>

The long months of sedentary work had, however, done much to undermine the powers of physical endurance which some years before had carried him triumphantly across Persia on a saddle and over the Hindu Kush to the cradle of the Oxus river on foot; and he received warning at the very outset of his holiday that he could no longer disregard physical fatigue with impunity. A ride of eighteen miles over a mountain road to Dalhousie, coming on top of a

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 22nd, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

sleepless night in the train and a drive of forty miles in the heat of the plains, was too much for him. "In the old days I could ride 60-70 miles a day with impunity, but my weak back will no longer admit of such ventures, and ever since my arrival here I have been in bed (where I am now writing) with racking pains. Few people at home can have any idea of the strain under which I work and play (in so far as I ever do the latter) in India, and I am sometimes almost amazed myself at the comparative success with which I pull through."<sup>1</sup>

He recovered sufficiently to proceed to Chumba and to spend a few days in the open air with a gun in his hand; but the break was too short to have any permanent effect, and his last few weeks at Simla before he embarked on his autumn tour were days of great weariness. "I will not detain you at length to-day," he told the Secretary of State on October the 17th, "because even if I had the material for doing so, I am much too tired. With the exception of three quarters of an hour for lunch I have sat for eight hours in succession in this chair, engaged for the greater part of this time in composing my famine speech for Council on Friday. I have not, therefore, much vitality left in me." And at the end of his letter he returned to the same subject.

"Upon Friday next at the last meeting of the Legislative Council I shall not only have to make my famine speech, but we shall have a prolonged and technical discussion upon the Punjab Land Alienation Bill. Really the last few weeks either of the Simla or Calcutta season are almost enough to kill any man. Though an official tour such as I am about to undertake is not one of the least exhaustive features of the year's work, it will be with positive delight that I shall pack up my trunks next week and be whirled away to Karachi."

News of developments in England served to relieve somewhat the monotony of his work, and he watched the progress of the General Election which took place in October with something more than academic interest. His own name was freely mentioned in the rumours which preceded the formation of the new Cabinet, and a

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated September 17th, 1900.

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

suggestion telegraphed out to India that he might not improbably be called on at an early date to fill a high position at home elicited such protests as must have made up for much of the drudgery of the closing weeks of the Simla season. The press in India, headed by the *Englishman* of Calcutta, reminded its readers of the great work on which the Viceroy was engaged ; of the splendid goal which he had set himself in India ; of the ability and enthusiasm with which he was addressing himself to the many urgent problems which he had taken in hand, and declared that it would be " little short of calamitous were India asked to undergo a change of Administration when the Viceroy had completed barely two years of his time." Lord Curzon was very far from being insensible to the implied compliment. " Last week," he wrote in a letter to St. John Brodrick on October the 17th, " I sent you the verdict of Simla. This week I send you that of Calcutta (the *Englishman*). I could equally give you Madras and Bombay ; but enough is as good as a feast."

On October the 25th the Viceroy and Lady Curzon left Simla for Karachi, the first stage in a journey of nearly eight weeks duration, which was to carry them completely round the peninsular—a tour of all but six thousand miles by rail, river, road and sea.

A Viceroy's tour does not mean any reduction in the volume of his daily labour. " Our life here is the same," he told Mrs. Craigie at the end of his journey, "strenuous, unceasing, exhausting, an endless typhoon of duty." But it provides change of scene and to some extent of work. And Lord Curzon, with his passion for novel sights and ancient monuments, always found refreshment for mind and body in his official visits to different parts of the country. On this occasion he had selected a route rich in the contrasts which Asia displays so lavishly and which he always found so extraordinarily exhilarating. At Karachi and Bombay he was to be brought into contact with striking examples of what modern commercial and industrial enterprise is capable of effecting on the ancient shores of Asia ; in Kathiawar, and later on in Cochin and Travancore, with the picturesque romance of mediæval India ; at Diu and Goa, with pathetic remnants of a glorious, if all but forgotten, epoch in the chequered history of the Portuguese.

Throughout the tour he was to have frequent opportunity of

## CURZON, 1900

visiting great buildings and famous ruins which in India provide so fascinating a substitute for the written record alike of her secular and her religious history. At Veraval, a small port on the coast of Kathiwar, he visited the famous temple of Somnath, the victim eight centuries before of an outburst of the fierce religious fanaticism with which Mahmud of Ghazni scourged the Hindu people, and within an ace of becoming, in more recent times, the victim of an act of pompous restitution, from which it was only spared by the timely discovery that the gates carried off from Ghazni by Lord Ellenborough, and claimed by him to be those alleged to have been taken from Somnath by Mahmud, were as a matter of fact doors of Moslem workmanship of a late and corrupt though well recognised style. In the state of Junagadh, now ruled by a Muhammadan Prince, he inspected an historic boulder on which are still decipherable the graven edicts of Asoka. Here too he climbed the four thousand three hundred granite steps leading to the famous Jain temples on the summit of Mount Girnar.

From Bombay he visited the historic caves of Karli and the ruins of Hampi and Bijapur. Here he inspected with lively interest the buildings of a vanished Muhammadan dynasty, mute witnesses to an episode in the age-long story of India, than which, he declared in a speech to the members of the Municipal Board, he knew of nothing in her wonderful history more astonishing or more sad. Here too he found painful evidence of a vandalism which excited his wrathful indignation ; mosques, tombs and palaces converted by the Public Works Department into public offices and civil residences ; the splendid old city wall torn down to admit air to the modern settlement, and "good British whitewash plentifully bespattered about in every direction." From Bijapur he passed to the site of the old Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, where he saw strewn over the ground "miles of ruined temples and palaces and tombs now given up to rank vegetation and to bats, but formerly the capital of a dynasty that had a short-lived but splendid existence," before it crumbled to the ground under the advancing tide of Muhammadan conquest.

At one part of his tour Lord Curzon was able to realise an ambition which he had formed thirteen years before, but had been

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

unable to accomplish at the time—that of visiting the falls of Gersoppa, which, though scarcely known outside India and visited by few even in that country, must yet fairly be described as “one of the great natural sights of the world.”

In Madras he re-visited the great Dravidian temples at Madura and Trichinopoly, whose architectural features had astonished and repelled him on the occasion of his first visit to the country. In contrast to these and many other monuments of antiquarian interest which he inspected throughout his tour was a visit to the Kolar goldfields of Mysore—“a great mining camp of forty thousand souls planted upon a rolling upland or plateau under the gorgeous Indian sun. No dirt, no squalor, no pall of dense smoke as in an English mining village, but the same roar and rattle of machinery and the same ceaseless hum of toil.”<sup>1</sup> Every care was taken by the management to make his inspection of the mine interesting ; but I find no mention in his own letters of the old Cornish mining captain, who—according to Sir Evan Maconochie—smacked him on the knee as he sat beside him, and, telling him he knew he would ask “a lot of damfool questions,” handed him a typewritten paper containing the answers and addressed him all day as “sonney.”<sup>2</sup>

The Viceroy’s work throughout the length of this historic tour was exacting and incessant. Wherever he went he listened with careful attention to the Addresses which were presented to him dealing with a bewildering medley of subjects, some of local interest only ; some of a highly technical character ; some raising questions of an acutely controversial nature. No wonder that he confessed that the preparation of his replies threw upon him an almost overwhelming burden, often keeping him up far into the night at the close of a busy day, for during these weeks of strenuous travel he delivered no less than forty speeches. “I have now been for three days in Madras,” he wrote on December the 13th. “On the first morning there were six separate Addresses : and the ceremony of presentation and replies lasted an hour and a half. Since then I have been taken round all the sights and institutions until I can scarcely stand up for fatigue.

<sup>1</sup>This and other quotations in the two preceding paragraphs are from letters written by Lord Curzon to the Secretary of State.

<sup>2</sup>“Life in the Indian Civil Service,” by Sir Evan Maconochie, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., page 118.

## CURZON, 1900

Then there have been interviews with Rajas, Zemindars, Members of Council, representative men, and so on ; a levée, an evening party, big dinners, two garden parties—even one's memory reels at the retrospect."

Moreover, nearly the whole of the tour was carried out in the terribly hot and enervating climate which during the greater part of the year envelops the coastal districts both on the west and on the east of the peninsular. "We have cruised about in the *Clive* in search of a breeze," Lady Curzon noted in her diary : "but the heat has been fearful and the sea like molten lead without a ripple, and if it were not for electric fans in my cabin I should dissolve entirely." And if it was hot at sea, what of the temperature on land ? The diary which Lady Curzon kept makes constant reference to the discomfort of the climate. "It is impossible to describe the amusing scene in the audience room of the palace, with all of us sitting in a row," she wrote in a passage descriptive of their visit to the Portuguese settlement at Diu. "George was so hot that his collar had gone, and he was fanning himself with an immense red satin fan edged with swansdown. . . . Major Baring, Mr. Lawrence and all the rest were ranged down the room fanning." Formal functions under such conditions were extremely trying. "Oh ! the heat, the heat," she exclaimed at Bombay. "I am getting more used to it ; but dressing in it is simply awful, and with broad, swift rivers running down all over you, it is hard to appear dry and smiling at a daily dinner party."

There had been an idea of relieving the strain of the tour with occasional shoots ; but for one reason or another these interludes proved abortive. The maneless lion of Kathiawar was found on enquiry to be not far from extinct ; "and as there are only about twenty lions, and they are more or less named and numbered," noted Lady Curzon, "he (the Viceroy) gave up what might have been a *pour rire* expedition ; and now, alas, we shall never see, save in a zoo, the maneless lion of Kathiawar." Similarly a few days in camp in the Mysore jungle were barren of result, for the wild elephants, though numerous, refused to move in the direction of the Kheddah ; and a herd of bison which the Viceroy stalked successfully turned out to consist only of cows.

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

One of the results of a tour which provided so much of antiquarian interest was to determine the Viceroy to pursue with unrelenting vigour his campaign for the preservation of ancient monuments. And one of his earliest acts on his return to Calcutta in December was to sign a Despatch to the Secretary of State, asking his sanction for the appointment of a Director of Archaeology. In a private letter he appealed for the good offices of the former in terms which were more forceful than flattering to the members of the India Council at Whitehall. "In any case, do let me entreat you to save from their (the India Council's) devastating and pernicious activity the proposals which we are sending home to you this week for appointing a Director or Inspector General of Archaeology and for spending a little more money for a few years on the conservation of ancient buildings."<sup>1</sup> Beautiful remains, he declared, were tumbling into irretrievable ruin simply for the want of a directing hand and a few thousand rupees.

But the outstanding feature of the tour was undoubtedly the interest which it excited amongst all classes of the population. Lord Curzon visited Native States in which no Viceroy had ever set foot before. Wherever he went his utterances were followed with unusual interest, for in place of conventional compliments he spoke frankly what was in his mind ; and those who listened to his speeches, and those who read them, realised that here was a master mind and one, moreover, that had a profound grasp of the particular problems of the East. Stories had percolated through to the illiterate masses of the wonders he had worked when visiting famine areas, and he was widely credited with miraculous powers. The interest of the educated classes had been caught by the firm stand which he had taken for justice in cases of collisions between Englishmen and the natives of the country. When the part which he had played in the Rangoon outrage case became known it had been suddenly realised that the claim which he had made when he first landed in Bombay, that it would be his constant endeavour "to hold the scales even," was no mere rhetorical flourish, but a guiding principle which he kept steadily before him. The energy with which he probed into questions of all kinds himself won hearty applause ; and the spirit of reverence

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, December 20th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

with which he approached his self-appointed task of rescuing the decaying monuments of vanished epochs of Indian history from the destructive hand of time ministered to the *amour propre* of a sensitive and emotional people. And the tour, upon which he embarked in the autumn of 1900, soon showed that in less than two years he had impressed his personality on the land in a way in which no previous Viceroy had succeeded in doing in the course of the whole five years of his term of office.

At Bombay he received a welcome from the populace at large which excited widespread comment. "This afternoon," noted Lady Curzon in her diary on November the 8th, "we drove through the native town with the Governor's bodyguard and an escort of Bombay cavalry. Millions turned out and cheered us for six miles, and I believe the enthusiasm has never been equalled in Bombay." Nor was she alone in this opinion. The newspaper correspondents were unanimous in their opinion that no Viceroy had ever been more heartily received in Bombay. "The progress of the Viceroy through India seems to be partaking more of the nature of a triumphal march than of a sober autumn tour."<sup>1</sup> Anxiety to hear his speech in reply to an Address of welcome from the Corporation was so great that it was impossible to find accommodation for more than a fraction of those who sought admission to the Town Hall. No such scene of enthusiasm had been witnessed within living memory, and the function itself was described as an entirely unusual one. The words of welcome read by the Chairman of the Corporation on behalf of its members resembled "not so much an Address as a vote of confidence and affection";<sup>2</sup> and the reply which Lord Curzon made struck a note, echoes of which reached the most distant cities of the continent.

"You have spoken of the impartial administration of justice," he said, "as having been the guiding principle I have borne in view. It is true that I have tried never to lose sight of the motto which I set before myself when I landed here—namely, to hold the scales even. Experience has shown me

<sup>1</sup>Indian Daily News of November 12th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>The Times of November 10th, 1900.

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

that it is not always an easy task, but experience has convinced me that it is always the right one. If a man is to succeed in carrying it out he must expect sometimes to be abused and frequently to be misunderstood. By one party he will be suspected of disloyalty to the rights of his countrymen, by the other of imperfect sympathy with its aspirations or aims. . . . These little drawbacks may sometimes worry and sometimes impede, but they do not for one moment affect the conviction with which I started two years ago and which I now hold if possible more strongly still, that it is by native confidence in British justice that the loyalty of the Indian peoples is assured and that the man who either by force or by fraud shakes that confidence is dealing a blow at British dominion in India. If to justice we can add that form of mercy which is best expressed by the word *consideration*, and which is capable of showing itself in almost every act and incident of life, we have, I think, a key that will open most Indian hearts."

The other passage in the speech which focused public attention was that in which he spoke of the advantage to Government of a sane and instructed public opinion.

"There is one respect in which it has been my constant endeavour to infuse an element of the modern spirit into Indian administration. I can see no reason why in India, as elsewhere, the official hierarchy should not benefit by public opinion. Official wisdom is not so transcendent as to be superior to this form of stimulus and guidance. Indeed, my inclination where the Government is attacked is not to assume that the critic must inevitably be wrong, but that it is quite conceivable that he may be right. In any case, I enquire. Of course, it is easy to disparage public opinion in a continent like India ; to say that it is either the opinion of the merchants, or the Civil Service, or the army, or the amateurs in general ; or if it be native public opinion, that it only represents the views of the infinitesimal fraction who are educated. No doubt this is true. But all these are the various sections upon whose intelligent co-operation the Government depends.

## CURZON, 1900

To the masses we can give little more than security and material comfort in their humble lives. They have not reached a pitch of development at which they can lend us anything more than a passive support. But the opinion of the educated classes is one that it is not statesmanship to ignore or to despise."

It was not always possible to defer to the views expressed by different sections of the public, nor could Government divest itself of its proper responsibility. But there were many ways in which it was open to it to endeavour to enlist public opinion on its side.

" It can hearken to both sides of a case ; it can take the public into its confidence by explaining what to the official mind seems simple enough, but to the outside public may appear quite obscure ; in framing its legislation it can profit by external advice instead of relying solely upon the arcana of official wisdom. It can look sympathetically into grievances instead of arbitrarily snuffing them out. These, at any rate, are the principles on which I have tried, during the past two years, to conduct the administration of India, and they seem to have been so far successful as to win approval at your hands."

These sentiments met with hearty approval both in the Indian and the English-owned press, with the significant exception of the *Pioneer*, which had the reputation of voicing the views of the Services. Of course, as Lord Curzon predicted, different people attached different meanings to the phrase " Public Opinion." The *Times of India* interpreting it, not as the opinion of a small body of politicians, but as the views derived from a practical knowledge of agriculture, industry and commerce by the better educated classes in India of both races, singled out for special applause this passage in what it described as the Viceroy's " remarkable speech." There is little doubt that this was a correct understanding of what Lord Curzon himself had in mind when he spoke of public opinion, for he was always a little contemptuous of the pretensions of the small minority of Indian politicians to speak for the Indian people—a view which with his usual courage he did not hesitate to speak aloud. The only

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

purely political body from which he received an Address in the course of his tour was the Madras Mahajana Sabha, and he took advantage of the occasion to make his attitude towards such pretensions perfectly clear.

“ But first, gentlemen, I should like to be quite certain for whom you speak. In your opening sentence you tell me that it is on behalf of the members of the Mahajana Sabha of Madras. But a little later on your representative character would appear to have acquired a wider scope, since, when you come to the subject of famine prevention, you ‘crave my permission to give expression to the views of the Indian public,’ while when you come to an expression of your views on the subject of judicial and executive functions, you again present me with what you describe as ‘the unanimous voice of the Indian public.’ Now, gentlemen, the Indian public is rather a big concern. It consists, exclusive of Muhammadans, of nearly 250,000,000 ; inclusive of Muhammadans, of some 300,000,000 persons. I am a little sceptical as to the possibility of this huge constituency being adequately represented by an association whose membership does not, I believe, extend beyond 200, and which I gather from your rules does not require for its general meetings a quorum of more than 15 ; and I prefer, therefore, to accept your opinions as representative of certain, and I doubt not most important, elements in Hindu society in the Madras Presidency, rather than as a pronouncement from the entire Indian continent.”<sup>1</sup>

He expressed himself with similar emphasis in a letter to the Secretary of State. Sir William Wedderburn had addressed him in the hope of extracting from him some declaration that might be regarded as favourable to the Congress. “Now, I am not going to be tempted into anything of the sort,” he told the Secretary of State. “My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise. I told him plainly, therefore, that I felt myself incapacitated from

<sup>1</sup>Speech of December 11th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

giving any opinion about, or offering any advice to, the Congress ; but I added that while I was myself sensible of the desirability of consulting and conciliating public opinion in India, the composition of the Congress, at any rate in recent years, had deprived them of any right to pose as the representatives of more than a small section of the community.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the conservative element in the Indian upper and middle classes was genuinely gratified at the Viceroy’s recognition of its importance in his Bombay speech, and the politically minded probably read into his use of the phrase “public opinion” more than it was intended to convey. At any rate, the Bombay speech may be said to have marked the height of his popularity with all classes of the Indian people. He was applauded by Indian writers for daring the displeasure of his own countrymen by his courageous championship of justice for the people of the soil. “In the case of Lord Curzon it is the unexpected that has happened. As an active Conservative politician he was known to be ambitious and an Imperialist. The thinking portion of the natives of India received the announcement of his appointment with reserve. The Anglo-Indian press welcomed him as a ruler after its own heart. But Anglo-Indian hopes and Indian apprehensions have been alike unfulfilled and, though less than half way through his brief period of office, Lord Curzon has already won his place among the wisest and most statesmanlike Viceroys of India. . . . From the day of his assumption of office he has applied himself with strenuous singleness of purpose to the well-being of India and her people.”<sup>2</sup>

In an earlier chapter of this biography something has been said of Lord Curzon’s capacity for taking a curiously detached view of himself.<sup>3</sup> It was a valuable asset, for it necessarily served to steady his judgment. “I think I know pretty clearly how and where I stand,” he told Sir Arthur Godley, on his return to Calcutta at the close of what had been described as his “triumphal march round India.” He was not loved by those at the top of the official hierarchy in the country, nor by the soldiers, who had never forgiven him for

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated November 18th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. N. Gupta writing in *The Twentieth Century*.

<sup>3</sup>See Vol. I, chapter III, p. 66.

## THE AUTUMN TOUR OF 1900

the part that he had played in the Rangoon outrage case. But the majority of the younger men in the Services supported him.

"I do everything that I can to encourage and bring them on, for they are the men of the future, and I want to found a tradition. The non-official, mercantile, planting, etc., public is, I think, strong for me ; for they recognise in me a kindred loathing for red tape. The Indian public in its upper and educated sections admires my sentiments and my speeches, and expects all sorts of things that it can never get. Perhaps before long it will abuse me as vigorously as it now applauds. The masses at large are, I believe, affected with a quite extraordinary interest, partly because of vague rumours of my doings and sayings ; still more because, wherever I go, I seem to bring precisely the change of the weather that is required."<sup>1</sup>

There was one other aspect of the problem arising out of British dominion in India which Lord Curzon showed by a speech delivered on this tour had not escaped him. It is generally supposed that the time and energy which he devoted to the administrative side of his work left him little leisure for meditation upon the deeper but less tangible effects of the close contact in India between East and West. It is undoubtedly the case that he will live in history as a great administrator, even perhaps as one who was ready to sacrifice too much to mere administrative efficiency. But he was by no means insensible to the psychological problem raised by the enforced interaction of two races with different traditions behind them and a radically different outlook upon life. He had no desire to see the Indian people uprooted from their own cultural and intellectual soil. "There can be no greater mistake," he told the students at the Rajkumar college in Kathiawar, "than to suppose that because in this and the other Chief's colleges in Northern and Central India the boys are given the nearest equivalent of which India admits to an English public school education the aim is, therefore, to turn them outright into English boys. If this college were to emancipate its students from old-fashioned prejudices or superstitions at the cost of denationalisation, I for one should think

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, December 13th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1899

the price too heavy. The Anglicised Indian is not a more attractive spectacle in my eyes than the Indianised European. Both are hybrids of an unnatural type.”<sup>1</sup>

He was conscious, too, of the beginnings of a reaction against the westernisation of India. Professor Max Müller had called his attention to the hold which Hindu philosophy still had on the Indian people. The strange thing is, he wrote, when sending him a copy of his book on “The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy,” that, “while Greek philosophy has vanished from the Areopagus, Indian philosophy still rules at Benares and influences the thoughts of millions in a more or less diluted form.” The Viceroy agreed, and admitted that it was difficult to foresee the outcome of these stirrings in the soul of India.

“There is no doubt that a sort of quasi-metaphysical ferment is going on in India, strongly conservative and even reactionary in its general tendency. The ancient philosophies are being re-exploited, and their modern scribes and professors are increasing in numbers and fame. What is to come out of this strange amalgam of superstition, transcendentalism, mental exaltation, and intellectual obscurity—with European ideas thrown as an outside ingredient into the crucible—who can say?”<sup>2</sup>

But the matter seemed to him to be of academic interest rather than of practical importance, and he turned from these insoluble problems of the spirit to the more pressing problems of administration, to which it was no idle boast that he habitually devoted from ten to twelve hours out of every twenty-four.

<sup>1</sup>Speech at Rajkot, November 5th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Professor Max Müller, dated July 26th 1899.

## CHAPTER X

THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

JANUARY 1901

At a quarter to four on the morning of January the 23rd, 1901, the Viceroy was awakened to be apprised of the death of Queen Victoria. The news spread with great rapidity and was received with extraordinary demonstrations of grief throughout the country. Some years before, in Hong Kong, on the occasion of the Queen's jubilee, he had witnessed with the utmost astonishment the feelings of reverent affection displayed by an oriental people for the great white Queen who ruled from afar, but whose personality had so deeply impressed itself upon their imagination. Now, fourteen years later, he was to have further striking proof of the influence exercised upon vast masses of people of eastern birth by the intangible but dominant figure which throughout the lifetime of most of them had sat upon the throne, an almost divine personification of the might and majesty of Imperial Britain. No one who had not been in the country, he told the Secretary of State, could well realise the extent to which "the British Government, the Monarchy and the Empire were summed up and symbolised in the mind of the oriental in the personality of the Queen."<sup>1</sup>

The Queen's death had come suddenly. As recently as January the 11th she had written to the Viceroy, thanking him for his letters describing his tour. She had had great trials and sorrows, which had "shaken her a good deal," she told him, but otherwise was "pretty well." Nevertheless, unexpected though the sorrowful news had

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 24th, 1901.

been, Lord Curzon was quick to grasp the significance of the emotional depths which it had stirred in India. He saw intuitively that her reign constituted a definite epoch in British Indian history, and that the moment of its termination ought to be seized on to impress the fact in an enduring manner upon the mind of the people. How best could this be done? "All India is seething with the desire to raise some sort of memorial," he wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State on January 31st. "But in a country as large as Europe and split up by far greater differences of race and creed it is very difficult to settle on anything which will concentrate the public feeling and at the same time worthily commemorate Her Majesty's virtues and reign."

In spite of these difficulties his own mind was quickly made up. Within a week of the Queen's death he had drafted and circulated to the heads of Local Governments and to a number of representative Indian and European gentlemen an elaborate confidential memorandum, setting forth a clear-cut scheme for commemorating her reign. He allowed no time to be lost. The memorandum had been sent out on January the 29th; within a day or two it was discussed in confidence with as many of those to whom it had been submitted as were available in Calcutta, and on February the 4th was published in an enlarged and slightly amended form in the Indian press. The possible forms which a memorial might take were enumerated—should India from its contribution erect a building or create a fund, or endow a trust? Objections to the latter two alternatives were stated and the alternatives themselves dismissed. "The conclusion, therefore, is arrived at that some sort of a building or structure, provided it be on a sufficiently noble scale, and that it possesses the requisite connection with the Queen's reign and personality, will in reality constitute the best type of memorial; and further, that, if a locality is to be selected for the erection of such a monument, Calcutta is the inevitable site."

The nature of the building most appropriate to the circumstances of the case was then sketched in considerable detail. Nothing was more striking in India, he declared, than the paucity of relics of the momentous crises through which the Empire had passed, the thrilling scenes that it had witnessed, the dramatic incidents both

## THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

of war and peace, the famous men by whom it had been served. Other countries had their National Galleries or Imperial Museums. In the great capital cities of the world—London, Paris, Berlin, to name but a few—there were exhibited to the public view “ pictures and busts and statues of illustrious men, the arms they wore, the documents they signed, the letters they wrote, the articles they used, the personal relics, in fact, that bring history home to our imagination and make it a living reality instead of a printed page.” Such exhibitions did more than bring home to the people “ the actuality and personality of the past,” they tended to develop patriotism and public feeling. It was a cause of grave reproach that in India there was no place to go to where could be traced in a *coup d'œil*, the course of Indian history since the connections with Great Britain began, where could be seen the features or the figures of historic characters or the records of the marvellous half century and more that had passed under the sceptre of the late Queen. The conclusion set forth at the end of this closely reasoned document was, therefore, that no more befitting or more truly national form of a monument could be devised than a great building or hall of stately proportions and handsome design, “ which should for all time bear her name, and which should commemorate, so far as we can recover them, the renowned or remarkable episodes of the past and should provide a gallery or museum for the collection of similar objects in the future.”

These arguments were expounded and enforced by the Viceroy in two speeches delivered in Calcutta on February the 6th and 26th, the first before a great public gathering convened by the Sheriff at the Town Hall, the second in the presence of an audience assembled at the invitation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal at the Dalhousie Institute. At the former meeting he was able to announce that though the subscription list had been open for no more than two days, offers had reached him which were “ splendid in their scale of munificence,” there being included in the list of offers received sums ranging from 2,500 to 1,500,000 rupees.

It must be clear that a scheme propounded in so much detail within a week of the death of the person to whom it was intended to be a memorial was something more than a happy thought of the passing hour. The whole project was, indeed, stamped in peculiar

## CURZON, 1901

degree with Lord Curzon's own personality. His passion for reconstructing history in some tangible form had manifested itself when he had first lingered lovingly among the ancient buildings of Greece and Rome. When he had turned his gaze from Europe to Asia he had been shocked at the callous indifference of Government and people to the importance of erecting monuments in commemoration of the great exploits which had marked the unprecedented achievements of their race in building up so majestic a structure as British India out of the debris amid which two centuries of Moghul rule had spluttered to extinction. He had been less than a year in India when he told the Secretary of State that he proposed during his time to commemorate, by tablets or otherwise, all the interesting houses and sites in Calcutta and to erect in the capital of British India "some memorials of its wonderfully dramatic past."

In pursuance of this scheme he had applied to the India Office for permission to remove the statue of Sir Ashley Eden from the site which it occupied, in order that he might restore the obelisk which had formerly stood there in memory of those who had perished in the Black Hole. The India Council had protested against the idea of "parading our disaster and the consequences which ensued" before the native population; and the Secretary of State himself had asked to be a little more fully informed of the Viceroy's reasons for desiring "to recall attention to this episode in our earlier history in Bengal."<sup>1</sup> Lord Curzon had at once taken up the challenge. He could not for a moment agree with the view put forward by the India Council. He was going to have the entire *enceinte* of the old fort marked out by marble slabs, so that the knowledge which scholars had been slowly amassing might be preserved before all trace of it had vanished. The re-erection of Holwell's obelisk was part of the general scheme. It had never been intended to be a record of disaster, but a monument to those who had lost their lives. It had been placed over their bodies, "upon which Sir Ashley Eden now sits in a grotesque marble chair." The Viceroy went on to make it clear that the re-erection of the monument was a matter with which the India Council were in no way concerned. The matter had only been referred home out of courtesy to the

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, November 9th, 1899.

## THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

surviving relatives of Sir Ashley Eden, whose statue it was proposed to move. He believed that Sir William Eden of Windlestone Hall in the county of Durham, was the nearest surviving relative—"and I cannot conceive that it matters one jot to him whether his late respected cousin reposes in his marble chair in a beautiful garden where I propose to place him, or in a shrieking thoroughfare crowded with babus and intersected by trams."<sup>1</sup> The fact that these men had died owing to native treachery could not be held to deprive them of their right to have their names commemorated, "while the fact that their death was practically the foundation stone of the British Empire in India invests their memory with a peculiar historical importance."<sup>2</sup>

No trouble was too great in a matter of this kind. Lord Curzon found that he could not get an obelisk to his liking made in India, and he therefore turned to Europe and secured one of Sicilian marble from Italy, whence it was shipped in the autumn of 1902 to Calcutta. The cost of freight, erection and fixing of the tablets was borne by the Local Government; but in order to escape the charge of spending money from public revenues on an object of possible controversy he made himself responsible for the cost of the actual monument.

While engaged in these activities there had been forming in his mind the idea of just such a hall as he now recommended as the most suitable memorial to the late Queen. This he explained to the heads of Local Governments in a letter dated February the 8th, 1901.

"As regards the proposed Victoria Hall or Gallery, I have seen it hinted that the scheme has sprung with insufficient consideration into being. This is not the case. I have been working personally at it ever since I came to India. Not with any idea of connecting the project with the death of the Queen—which of course was not anticipated—but with the resolve to formulate such a project and, if possible, to carry it out before I left the country. I have even gone so far as to have lists made of the various statues and objects which I shall hope to collect within its walls . . . I happen to know that the whole of the effects of Warren Hastings are still in existence in England,

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 11th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 26th, 1899.

## CURZON, 1901

in the possession of a maiden lady who has no connection whatever with his family or name. That is the sort of bequest that I shall endeavour to get hold of. . . . When Wellesley built this Government House everyone laughed at him for raising—in the then condition of the British power in India—so monumental a pile. Now everyone says that he showed the foresight and the imagination of a statesman. Similarly, at Calcutta later generations will fill the halls and galleries which this will raise."

The history of the Victoria Memorial Hall from its inception in 1901 to its opening in 1921 has been told by Lord Curzon himself in the second volume of his "British Government in India," and it is only necessary here to emphasise the fact that the stately building, which in its shimmering white beauty is a worthy rival of the Taj at Agra, is in a very special sense the creation of Lord Curzon. From the time that he first commended the idea to the people of India in a speech, "the extraordinary fire and earnestness" of which made a deep impression on those who heard it, it was realised that the building which he had in mind would be not only a splendid memorial to a famous reign, but in a not much inferior degree to a great Viceroyalty.<sup>1</sup> For five years—from 1917 until after the formal opening of the building by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, in December, 1921—I served as Chairman of the Executive Committee charged by the Trustees with the duty of carrying on the work, and I had special facilities, therefore, for forming an estimate of what the project owed to the genius and driving power of its originator. And I have no hesitation in saying that few men could have carried through to a successful issue so ambitious a project hedged around by so many difficulties. His active interest in the work did not cease with his departure from India. Right up to the day of his death he was constantly consulted on all questions of importance concerning the progress of the work; and at the request of the Trustees he purchased many objects for the collection which, without his unremitting personal care, would never have attained either the dimensions or the character which now distinguish it.

<sup>1</sup>*Capital* of February 28th, 1901.





THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL, CALCUTTA

## THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

At the outset he was faced with many difficulties and no little opposition. Indeed, he soon found that he had undertaken a task which was going to place a heavy tax upon his strength. Every other Province was jealous of Bengal, and every Provincial capital was jealous of Calcutta; and Lord Curzon found it necessary to explain that he had no desire to coerce the other Provinces into combining on a single monument. Let each Province erect its own memorial if it so desired ; only let it of its generosity contribute something to a great all-India memorial as well. He brought the whole of his amazing industry to bear upon the project. "I have pursued the national scheme with relentless ardour," he told Sir S. McDonnell, on March the 17th, "controlling the whole proceedings, writing all the letters (not, of course, in my own hand), organising the collections and making things hum. The result is that I shall have an enormous sum of money. . . . With it I shall erect a noble white marble hall in Calcutta which is to be a sort of valhalla of all Indian heroes and worthies with the Queen as the centre."

Had he not already formed in his mind a very clear conception of exactly what he wanted, the question of an architect might in itself have provided a formidable difficulty. As it was, with the assistance of his old friend Lord Esher, the matter was quickly settled. "I want a magnificent shell," he told the latter, when seeking his advice ; "pure and severe in its simplicity, with various galleries and corridors radiating round the central space, which will be devoted to the Queen. In other words, I want a highly skilled architect who can rise to a great conception."<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances Lord Esher found little difficulty in advising him. "To a certain extent," he wrote, "the choice of an architect is always a leap in the dark, but on the other hand *if you know yourself what you want*, and you employ a man who is thoroughly acquainted with the technique of his profession, you will not find one man differ very materially from another."<sup>2</sup> The outcome of this correspondence was the selection of Mr., afterwards Sir, William Emerson, whose beautiful design in the Italian renaissance style gave faithful expression to Lord Curzon's idea.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Esher, April 12th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated May 17th, 1901.

Not all the difficulties were as easily overcome; and, in spite of his enthusiasm, there were occasional moments of depression when in face, not only of a dead weight of inertia, but of an opposition which seemed to him to be altogether gratuitous, Lord Curzon almost lost heart. "Everybody seems to combine," he complained in a letter to Ian Malcolm, on June the 10th, "to place obstacles in the way of my popularising this scheme—so that I almost regret having taken it up."

Still the project prospered and the appeal for funds met with a magnificent response. In spite of the fact that Lord Curzon refused to accept the huge offers of some of the Indian Princes, feeling, as he said, that the memorial ought to be erected by the contributions of the thousands rather than by the munificence of the few, he received in the short space of three months no less than £220,000, and was able to boast when he left India three years later that this sum had swollen to nearly £400,000. Later on it was found that even this great total was not sufficient to complete the scheme. The world war produced its effect in India as elsewhere; the price of material and the cost of living, and with them the level of wages, rose; and other difficulties in obtaining from the quarries of Makrana in Jodhpur, whence the Moghul builders of Delhi and Agra had drawn their supplies, the huge quantity of marble required, were experienced. Further appeals were made both to the Indian and Bengal Governments and to the public, and by December the 31st, 1925, the total expenditure on the project had risen to approximately £550,000.

Though the Memorial was formally opened by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, grandson of Queen Victoria, on December the 28th, 1921, all but sixteen years after the state laying of the foundation stone by King George V, then Prince of Wales, in January 1906, the building is not even yet complete in all its details. Yet few who were present at the stately opening ceremony in 1921 would deny that the goal which Lord Curzon set before himself twenty years before had been reached. It is, indeed, the finest structure that has been reared in India since the days of the Moghuls, and the most splendid concrete monument of British rule.

## CHAPTER XI

### A SOLITARY SUMMER

MARCH—OCTOBER 1901

THERE was little leisure for recreation in these strenuous days. The legislative Session alone made heavy demands upon the Viceroy's time. Bills that had been jettisoned the year before had to be taken in hand. Two controversial measures of importance—the Mines Bill and the Assam Labour Bill—were successfully carried ; and, at the end of the Budget debate which brought the Session to a close the Viceroy reviewed the work which had been successfully accomplished, not merely by the Legislature during the past Session, but by the Government during the period that had elapsed since he had taken over the reigns of office. Two years before he had excited interest by his reference to twelve subjects with which he had proposed to get to grips. He had discreetly refrained from naming them at the time, lest he should prove to be more prolific in promises than in performance. But in view of the progress which had since been made, he now felt justified in “ indicating in more precise language ” how far his Government had travelled along the road upon which they had then set foot.

Real progress had been made with a number of his twelve subjects. The problem of the Frontier in its two-fold aspect—military and administrative—had been successfully solved. Next in importance he placed the remedy which he had devised for the too frequent transfers of officers from one district to another. It was hopeless, he said, to expect good administration without continuity, intelligent administration without local knowledge, popular administration

without personal interest. And he hoped that the reform of the leave rules which had been instituted would do much to mitigate the existing evil. Similarly, the administrative machine had been overhauled in all its branches : the mass of superfluous writing with which its wheels had become clogged had been drastically cut down, and a salutary impetus imparted to it in every one of its departments. He then passed on to two matters of special interest to the commercial community, laying stress upon the importance of the change which had been effected in the currency system, the outstanding feature of which was the stabilisation of the rupee, and of the efforts which he had made to place the development of railways on commercial rather than on departmental lines. So much for the first six items in his table of twelve. But this did not exhaust the tale of what had been accomplished. He had already issued orders for a comprehensive investigation into the possibilities of irrigation, with a special view to guarding against future famine ; while the vexed problem of the increasing indebtedness of the agricultural population had also been taken in hand. As an experimental measure a Bill, entitled the "Punjab Land Alienation Bill," had been framed with the particular object of benefiting the illiterate peasantry of that Province, and was now the law of the land.

Other matters to which the Viceroy referred in his comprehensive survey were the preservation of ancient monuments and the delicate topic of the relations between British soldiers and the natives of the country. And he mentioned two questions of the highest importance as now receiving his anxious thought : first, a reform of the educational system, which would place education in India in its various branches—University, higher, secondary, technical and elementary—upon a definite and scientific footing and would determine clearly the relations between private enterprise and the State; and, secondly, a drastic reorganisation of the police force, with a view to getting rid of the abuses which had, admittedly, crept into a service which was inadequately paid and was open to great and very obvious temptations.

The speech was one to which Lord Curzon attached great importance. He had devoted much thought to its preparation. "I came back this afternoon from Barrackpore," he told Lady Curzon, on

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

March the 25th. "There I spent a quiet Sunday, writing my Budget speech, which is now finished and covers the whole of the ground." And when sending a copy to the Secretary of State he referred to it as "A history of the first half of my Administration." He also sent a copy to Lord Salisbury—"It is long since I troubled you with a letter; nor have I much to say now. I am, however, venturing to send you a copy of a speech that I made the other day, summing up our administration here of the last two years and indicating what lies before me. It may interest you in some spare moment to glance at it, as providing some sort of synopsis of what Indian Government at present means."<sup>1</sup> It was all part of his policy of taking the public into his confidence; and he looked forward with keen anticipation to the comments of the press. Lady Curzon was well aware of the importance which he attached to the occasion, and wrote from the Indian Ocean, on March the 27th—"This is your great Budget speech day, and I shall tingle with impatience until I can read the great speech." On the same day he was busy writing her an account of it. "Budget just over," he wrote. "My speech took 65 minutes. There was a large attendance. 'My Lord'<sup>2</sup> quacked loudly at the end, and assured me it was a great performance. Rop<sup>3</sup> sat buried in profound slumber. Hensman<sup>4</sup> was there in morning and pointedly absented himself in afternoon. The *Pioneer* will, of course, have its usual attack."

The hostile attitude of the latter paper was a constant source of irritation. "I send you the remarks of *Capital* on my Budget speech," he wrote, on March the 29th. "Of course, the *Pioneer* passes it over without comment, though the *Daily News* says it was the most remarkable speech ever delivered at the Council table." And the next day he returned to the matter. "The *Pioneer* has never printed my big speech, only extracts from it; said not one word about the soldiers part, and left that out altogether from its report. Isn't the whole thing mean? Reuter reports that the papers at home, notably the *Daily Chronicle* (!) are loud in praise of my Budget speech. But I very much doubt if Hensman sent a line of it to *The Times*."

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 31st, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Sir John Woodburn.

<sup>3</sup>Mr., afterwards Sir, Walter Lawrence.

<sup>4</sup>Mr. H. Hensman, representative of the *Pioneer* and correspondent of *The Times*.

## CURZON, 1901

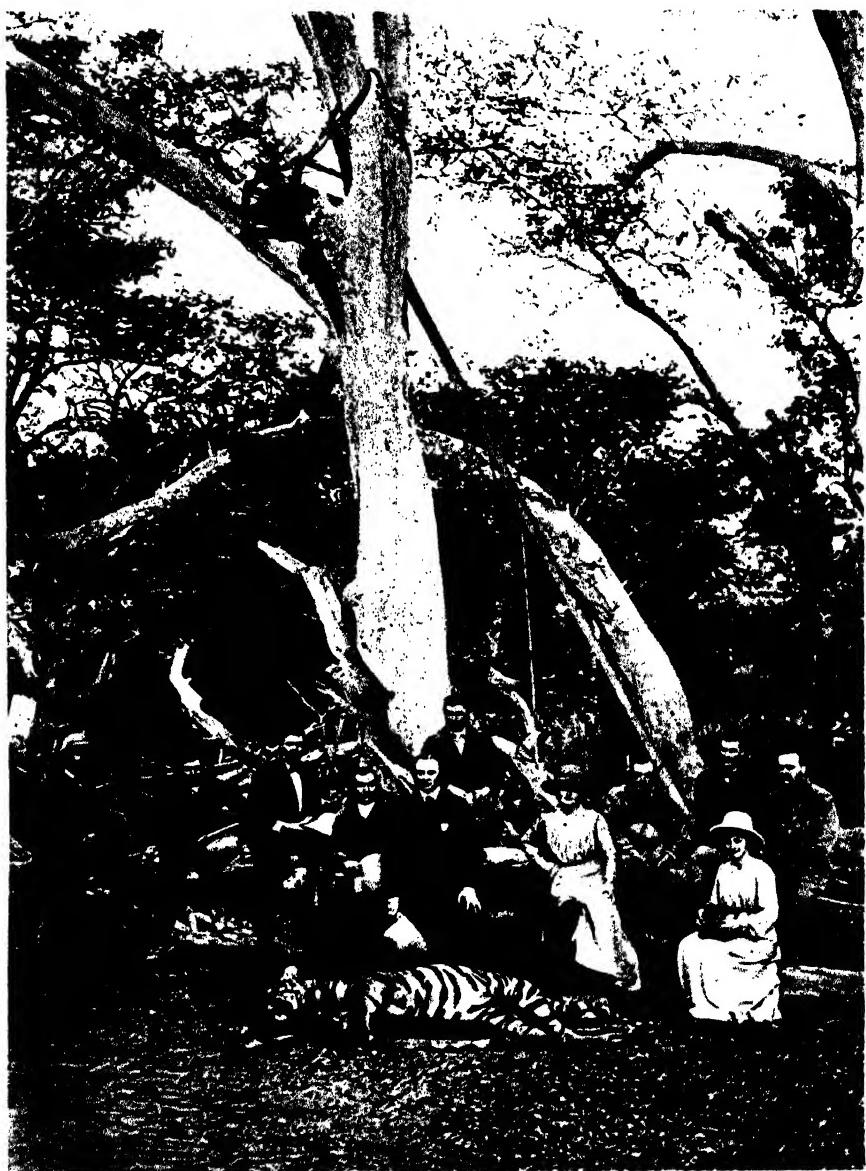
The strain of these last weeks had been very great, and even Lord Curzon's appetite for work was temporarily sated. "Thank God, I shall not have, so far as I can foresee, to make another speech on any subject until November next," he wrote on March the 27th. And on the eve of his departure from Calcutta he pausseted for a moment to take stock of the position.

"Before long I shall have been out here half my time," he reminded the Secretary of State, as a result of his stocktaking; "though in my judgment five years is not nearly long enough to enable a man to do lasting work. If this is so with a man who knew something about India before, and could therefore start at once, how much more must it be the case with a Viceroy who comes out knowing nothing of India and the East? He has barely learned his business before he is wafted away. On the other hand, I should think that the work of the post is the most continuous in the world; for there are no holidays, and the concentration of authority is greater than in any Administration that I have ever seen; so that it is doubtful whether the health of any man could stand it for more than six or seven years. It killed both Dalhousie and Canning, and the work nowadays has multiplied quite twenty-fold."

An additional cause of depression was the departure of Lady Curzon for Europe. Though not actually ill, she was feeling the effects of life and work in an exhausting climate, and had been strongly urged in her own interests, as well as for the sake of the children, to spend the summer in England. "I have a summer of horrible isolation before me," he lamented to Lord Salisbury.

For these various reasons, then, the Viceroy had agreed that his usual spring tour should take the form, so far as circumstances would allow, of a holiday. He had for long cherished the ambition of visiting Nepal, and had informed the Prime Minister of that country of his desire on the occasion of his formal interview with him on his first arrival in India. Though the suggestion had not been very warmly received at the time, he had not given up hope of being invited by the Nepal Durbar to visit Kathmandu. "I hope myself—but this is an absolute secret," he confided to a friend in the





ONE OF LORD CURZON'S TIGERS

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

summer of 1899, "to pay a visit to Nepal before long, and I might endeavour to get the Nepalese Government to allow a party to attack Mount Everest."<sup>1</sup>

The Nepalese Durbar, however, proved unexpectedly obdurate, and the most they were willing to concede was the courtesy which they had extended to other distinguished visitors, namely, that of a tiger shoot in the Nepal Terai. With this Lord Curzon had to rest content; and, if he was disappointed at his failure to secure an invitation to visit the capital, he at least looked forward to the recreation which was to be expected from three weeks in camp in the jungle-clad fringes of the Nepalese hinterland. "I am going to have a real good tiger shoot in Nepal in April. I dare say we shall get fifteen or twenty," he told his brother.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Curzon was a very good shot with a gun. "I went out a day or two ago with the great snipe shooter here," he mentioned in a letter in January; "a man named Dodd, who got the record bag last year of 131 couple to his own gun in a single day. The birds were fearfully wild, as there was no sun, but we managed to get fifty couple. Luckily I shot just as well as he did."<sup>3</sup> Before he left India he was himself to achieve a record. In a single day in Sind he shot one hundred and fifty-three duck. "This," he mentioned in a letter, "is said to be the Indian record."<sup>4</sup> Another memorable day was one in December 1903, on which he shot a hundred and twenty-seven duck; "there was never a low bird," he wrote when describing it; "the majority forty to eighty yards in the air."<sup>5</sup> He was an equally good shot with a rifle. On one occasion with a small double barrel Purdey rifle he killed six animals—tiger, bear and deer with six consecutive shots; and at another time, when shooting in Assam with the Maharaja of Kuch Behar, he killed stone dead one after the other three tigers moving at a gallop. The prospect of a

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Mr. Douglas Freshfield, dated July 9th, 1899. It is interesting to learn from this correspondence that the Mount Everest expeditions of 1922-24 had been definitely advocated by Lord Curzon more than twenty years before. "My point of view is in the main geographical," he wrote in the same letter. "We have on our northern border in India the greatest mountains in the world, and yet, owing to various obstacles or reasons, we know next to nothing of them. I should like to see a thoroughly competent party sent out to ascend or attempt the ascent of Kanchenjunga or of Mount Everest."

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Hon. F. N. Curzon, dated January 17th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., dated December 17th, 1903.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

## CURZON, 1901

shoot in Nepal was, therefore, an attractive one, and in spite of his fatigue he experienced some days of intense interest and excitement. One day he pursued and shot a rhino in an almost impenetrable jungle of pampas grass. "I saw the great brute dimly standing in a sort of tunnel that he had forced for himself through the bottom of the grass. He turned and fled. I fired a shot that caught him in the neck and sent him over like a rabbit. Then you never saw such a commotion. He kicked and plunged, and we had to pour at least a dozen shots into him before he was finished off."<sup>1</sup>

But even big game shooting lost something of its zest when Lady Curzon was not there to take part in the day's programme of work or play and to talk it all over with him in the evening. "You have not yet been gone three weeks," he wrote, on April the 3rd, "and it seems centuries." And he spent his spare time writing her long accounts of his doings. Of the bagging of the first tiger he wrote—"I wish you could have seen the whole sight. It was magnificent—200 elephants ringing this little plot of jungle grass and the single beast inside laughing at us for over an hour."<sup>2</sup>

Altogether twelve tigers were shot besides the rhinoceros and numbers of deer, boar, partridges and florican. But the long days in the sun were very tiring, and there was no escape from the discomfort of the plains in April. "I am lying in bed, infested with insects," he wrote on April the 17th. "Millions are swarming all over me, over the sheet, flying pat against the lamp, biting my legs. It has been an odious day; fifteen miles shaking and bumping on a pad till I cried with pain and had to get off and walk in the last part of the march. Then, when we came in, a raging dust storm. Everything choked with dust—had to lie in tents with all chicks down, hot as hell." In his overwrought state the holiday proved somewhat disappointing. "I left Calcutta pretty well played out," he had told Lady Curzon, in his letter of March the 29th. Moreover, he had taken the first shot at two only of the twelve tigers bagged, since, with extreme generosity, he had decided that each member of his staff should have the chance of bagging one; and he was not altogether sorry when the shoot was over. "To-morrow we are off to Naini Tal

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, April 17th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated March 29th, 1901.

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

and the great Nepal shoot is over—very tiring—disappointing as compared with the estimated bag—but yet a good shoot as compared with others.”<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which the Viceroy, in all other respects so self-reliant, had grown to depend upon Lady Curzon for companionship was little suspected by the public. Her absence created a void in his life which he vainly attempted to fill by unburdening himself in long conversational letters. His first thought on arriving at his destination at the end of a journey was always of her. From Simla he telegraphed and wrote to her in France. “I have just arrived. My first act has been to send you a telegram to Grasse. My second is to sit down to write this letter to leave by the mail early to-morrow.” He described his daily doings, the people whom he met, the progress of his work, his plans, his hopes and his fears—everything that formed the subject of daily discussion when they were together. “And now I will stop for the present,” he wrote towards the end of a letter of sixteen large quarto sheets, “since there is nothing more to say except that I feel indescribably lonely, and I shall doubtless feel lonelier every day. It is like living in a great sepulchre.” And he craved for constant and detailed news from her. “I like to hear everything each day, each hour, not a week condensed into a sheet. You must remember your letters are the only thing to me in the week. I have nothing to tell to you that is not stale and unprofitable. But you can put the life into me.”<sup>2</sup> He need have had no fear, for Lady Curzon’s letters were even more voluminous than his own. “I cannot tell you what an excitement Sunday evening or Monday morning is when the mail comes in,” he told her, on June the 5th. “I go straight to the big fat envelopes . . . such admirable letters, so full, so clear, so well expressed; just all that I like to hear and know. You must not overdo or tire yourself in writing them. But still, I cannot conceal from you what a joy it is to me to receive.”

Unless the texture of the bond by which they were united be fully understood, it is impossible to realise the agony of anxiety which ate into his soul during the closing days of his Viceroyalty, or the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, April 17th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated May 14th, 1901.

stunning nature of the blow which fell upon him shortly afterwards. Nor without full realisation of the mental torture which was added to bodily suffering can his attitude during those days of woe be justly judged.

But for the present there was no cause for anxiety. The hounds of Fate may have been straining at the leash, but they were still hidden from their victim. And in the letters of these days the puckish spirit of the Oxford undergraduate was often to be seen peeping out from behind the sober countenance of the Viceroy. Not all the toil and responsibility of office had blunted the sense of humour with which he looked out upon the world around him. With the detached air of an amused theatre goer he chuckled at the little peculiarities and mannerisms of the performers upon the stage, enlarging upon them and caricaturing them to his own unmeasured entertainment. "Few of your Lalkua friends were in Naini Tal," he told Lady Curzon in his letter of April the 24th, "expect the red moustachioed A——, who wore the same air of blank astonishment at the world in general, and read the lessons in church as though they were a Government Resolution." On his way from Naini Tal to Simla he spent a night at Bareilly with "a red-haired Scotchman who looks sideways at the sky while he addresses you"; and at the conclusion of a function at another halting place on his journey he took tea with a gentleman "whose wife was a lady with a huge purple feather in her hat, a naughty mouth and a roving eye."

News of a mishap to Lady Curzon's luggage while travelling in France called forth a torrent of half-humorous expostulation. "You must never travel without a courier again. B——, like most virtuous and ugly women, is stupid, and a stupid Scotchwoman is thicker than the Great Wall of China." Dullness was a characteristic in those with whom he came in contact at which he could never help scoffing. "You remember C——?" he wrote on one occasion. "A gravestone with a moustache hung on in front in place of an inscription, and a wife like a custard pudding, but excellent people." Even in matters in which he felt bitterly his sense of humour would at times obtrude itself. The break in his relations with Sir Mackworth Young over the creation of the North West Frontier Province was a

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

thing which, as we have seen, cut him to the quick ; yet there were incidents arising out of it which appealed to him as grotesquely comic. When attending a performance given by the Simla A.D.C., he found himself separated by a thin partition only from the wife of the Lieutenant-Governor. "Lady Young was in the adjoining box and gave me a medusa-like bow which would have frozen most people to stone."

From her end of the line Lady Curzon kept him informed of the impressions of his work in India which were current in England and of the political situation at home. The general ignorance about India amazed her. Everyone realised vaguely that the Viceroy was doing a great work, though few had any very clear idea as to its precise nature. "India is the great unknown. The moon seems nearer to the majority, and India isn't more than a huge troublesome name that spells famine and plague."<sup>1</sup> His Frontier Policy was regarded as his greatest achievement, especially as it was generally—and, of course, quite erroneously—supposed that this and other of his acts, notably his censure of the West Kent regiment and the publication of his Prince's circular, had been carried in the teeth of fierce opposition from his own Council. She was told that what puzzled everyone with regard to the circular was how it ever came to be published. People looked upon it much as if "the King of England had published an edict that Dukes were not to go to Monte Carlo and gamble."<sup>2</sup>

His prompt action in despatching troops to South Africa and so saving Natal was fully appreciated. And among the few who did know India his work was spoken of with genuine admiration. A talk with Sir Alfred Lyall had given her untold pleasure.

"Dear old Sir Alfred, it made my heart leap to hear him talk about India with a depth of feeling, imagination and knowledge that came like a burst of radiance after all the clouds of ignorance I have been enveloped in. He said, 'George Curzon has got his whole heart in his work ; whether we agree with all he does or not, we agree that no one ever had India's good more truly before him, and I think he is doing a wonderful

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated May 6th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## CURZON, 1901

work for India.' You know his rather absent, far away manner. Can't you see his old white head sunk in his narrow shoulders and the tips of his fingers together."<sup>1</sup>

Any reference to his work in the English press delighted her.

"I see the Prince's Cadet scheme in the papers this morning. . . . You are a ruler and an achiever and you are the only man living who is writing *choses faites* on the slate of time. It is perfectly magnificent."<sup>2</sup>

In political circles at home interest centred in St. John Brodrick's army scheme. So far as she could judge it was far from popular. "Mr. Lucy said there was a great feeling of opposition on all sides to it; so St. John isn't in smooth water."<sup>3</sup> She went to the House of Commons to listen to the army debate; but finding it dull at the moment, sought Arthur Balfour, to enquire what course the discussion was likely to take. "We found him engaged in writing his book (he said) and he seemed so aloof and so beautiful writing philosophy while the army debate raged below." The following week she again went to the House "to hear St. John on his army scheme," and found "a packed gallery and House and the usual foul air and fussing females sitting rows deep in the Speaker's gallery. St. John began with feeble humour, but improved as he went on and made a good speech. . . . Henry<sup>4</sup> replied and made a beat-the-box, ramping oration which was all words and no alternative scheme to the much abused one." Later in the evening she returned "to hear Arthur speak at 11.30. A faltering, 'if reasons there be, and I do not say there are not,' speech. And the House in a perfect uproar the whole time, interrupting, shouting and in a state of general pandemonium until he finished a speech which may *read* well but which *heard* calamitously."<sup>5</sup>

She told him of criticisms passed on St. John Brodrick's speeches by soldiers. But Lord Curzon brushed them aside as prejudiced and ill founded. "I don't agree with N. about St. John. I have read the latter's speeches in House of Commons and thought them very good,

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated May 12th, 1901.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., July 21st, 1901.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid., May 12th, 1901.

<sup>4</sup>Mr. H. H. Asquith, afterwards Earl of Oxford.

<sup>5</sup>Letter dated May 17th, 1901.

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

clear cool and courageous."<sup>1</sup> He was constant in his championship of him. "I am sorry to read what you have to say about the War Office," he had written in a letter to Sir A. Godley, on January the 3rd. "Brodrick is a resolute man and has much strength of character as well as rectitude of purpose. Perhaps he will do more than is expected." And in April he had returned to the subject in a letter to Lord George Hamilton. "I have heard of Brodrick's great success with unmeasured delight. I ventured to defend him in a letter to Godley some months ago; and he appears to be showing all the grit and courage with which I credited him."<sup>2</sup>

Among the Viceroy's friends in England Lady Curzon found a disposition to regard his exile as a sacrifice of his career at home. Some of them wrote and told him so themselves. "I wish I could see you and have a few talks. I delight in your speeches; they are fine in spirit and have the fearlessness I love. But you are needed here, in spite of your noble work in India. Things are weak at the capital, and you must remember the story of the Roman Empire."<sup>3</sup> Such talk always elicited a spirited rejoinder. "Of course, they are all wrong in saying that I am sacrificing my home career," he wrote Lady Curzon on July the 3rd. "When a man is doing well that which he is best qualified to do he is not sacrificing himself or anything else. He is merely doing the right and inevitable thing. Here I can do permanent good to the Empire. At home at the present juncture I could do none." Mr. G. Buckle, of *The Times*, had told Lady Curzon that if her husband had been in England he might now have been Foreign Secretary. He did not himself think so. "I do not think Buckle was correct about me. Had I been at home I should not have been Foreign Secretary." Nor did he think that with the country shackled by the South African war and its aftermath and its Foreign Minister obliged, therefore, to assume an attitude of respectful complaisance toward all and sundry, he would have found the post a congenial one. "I could not have bowed my head in the temple of every petty international Rimmon," he told Lady Curzon, on July the 8th. In any case, work of real importance for the Empire abroad would lay the

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated June 11th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Mrs. Craigie, June 8th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, April 1st, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

foundations of a stronger claim to the confidence of the public than mere service in the interests of a party at home. "If I am ever wanted to lead in England it will be because I have established my claim to be thought the right man. That will come from confidence in my character, not from futile struggles in support of a failing Ministry in an exhausted Parliament."<sup>1</sup>

Lady Curzon was not wholly convinced by such arguments. The life of the Government seemed to her to be a somewhat precarious one. If Chamberlain and Milner had captured the imagination of a section of the public which was strongly imbued with the sentiment of Empire, they excited violent antagonism in other quarters. For the rest, there was little enthusiasm for the Ministry, which she believed might disappear at any time if the Liberal party succeeded in closing its ranks. Whether there was any one leader under whom its various sections would unite was another matter. Lord Rosebery, "if he had inflexible purpose added to his gifts," might evolve unity out of the chaos into which the party had fallen; but she was puzzled by his instability and, with one of his brilliant speeches before her, she wrote—"Lord Rosebery captivates and fascinates, but never convinces; and this rocket which he has sent up may disappear into space and be followed by the old Liberal gloom." Still, it would be foolish to ignore the possibility of the unforeseen happening in politics at home.

"Your staying another year in India ought to depend entirely on politics in England. You must never let another Tory Government be formed with you out of the Foreign Office . . . If you keep your health, as I pray God you will with care, you have the whole future of the party in your hands. . . . No one has anything like your vigour, and there is an apathy in London about everything and everybody. Inertia seems to have attacked them all. They will need you to come back and wake them up. Great as your work is in India, there will be even bigger in England, where the party is slipping down the hill of indifference and incapacity."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, July 3rd, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon, July 5th, 1901.

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

She had much besides politics to write about, for no day passed without her committing to paper for despatch by the weekly mail everything that she did and all that she thought. "I hope you can make out my voluminous letters and that all the tittle tattle doesn't bore you. My thoughts never, never leave you, and I find that my whole interest in people is what they may tell me that may interest you."<sup>1</sup> He hastened to reassure her. "You must know that I love all the gossip in them. Conceive the deadly stagnation of my life here and then think of the weekly delight of getting this puff of air from the West which holds all that I hold most dear."<sup>2</sup> Thus encouraged, she pictured for him the lighter side of English politics, which she knew would appeal to his sense of humour.

"Some of those foolish hooligans<sup>3</sup> (who exist to entertain lions at dinner) invited Sir W. Harcourt to dinner last Thursday, and as Winston did not know he had been asked, he invited Lord Rosebery! Both accepted, and for the first time the Hooligan Party was confronted with a crisis. . . . They didn't know what to do. Lord Rosebery was put off and asked to come another night, unless he desired the pleasure of meeting Sir William. Awkward, to say the least! Later. Have just heard that night of dinner arrived. Lord Rosebery had been put off and Harcourt forgot to come!"<sup>4</sup>

His letters at this time show that behind the mask of cold assurance which he habitually wore in public there still beat the heart of an intensely human person—a person acutely subject to the particular frailties common to highly strung natures—extreme sensitiveness to success or failure, praise or blame, giving rise to alternate periods of elation and depression. *Aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem* is an injunction which he would most certainly have applauded, but which he was constitutionally incapable of living

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon, May 22nd, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon, July 3rd, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Certain of the younger and more independent members of the Conservative party who worked together in the House of Commons, recalling memories of the Fourth Party of an earlier day. The club consisted of five members—Lord Hugh Cecil, Lord Percy, Mr. Winston Churchill, the Hon. A. Stanley and Mr., afterwards Sir Ian, Malcolm, by whom it was started. It was founded primarily as a House of Commons dining club and was nicknamed "The Hooligans (Hughligans)" by Lord Salisbury.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon, July 21st, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

up to. "Geo. H. seems to have spoken out well for me in Budget debate," he wrote in buoyant spirits on August the 21st, "and even the old *Times* has squeezed forth a compliment. My shares going up!" But from such heights he crashed to more than corresponding depths of depression. "I don't mind one snap criticism just or unjust of what I have done, e.g., circular about Princes. I know more about it than the critics and I know that I am right, not they. What I bar is criticism of what I have not done, e.g., all these social lies."<sup>1</sup> A ridiculous story was current in England to the effect that Colonel Sandbach, who had accompanied him to India as Military Secretary, had resigned because the Viceroy insisted upon his standing behind his chair at meal times. Such slanders infuriated him. "I get so downcast sometimes in all this whirlwind of calumny and fiction."

He worried absurdly over matters of the most trivial importance. He had fallen into the habit of dropping the "of Kedleston" from his signature; and when the family of which Lord Howe was the head objected to this practice as an infringement of their own rights, he flung himself into a battle royal which involved him in a voluminous and acrid correspondence with all sorts of people throughout the summer, and ended in his receiving orders from the highest quarters which engendered feelings of almost childish mortification. He was assailed by a growing feeling that his work in India was not really appreciated in England, and it was when he brooded on what he regarded as the cynical indifference of the British Government and public to Imperial work of the highest importance that the iron entered most deeply into his soul and that he felt most poignantly his isolation. With Lady Curzon thousands of miles away he lamented bitterly that he had no one to sustain him. "Grind, grind, grind, with never a word of encouragement; on, on, on, till the collar breaks and the poor beast stumbles and dies. I suppose it is all right and it doesn't matter. But sometimes when I think of myself spending my heart's blood here and no one caring one little damn, the spirit goes out of me and I feel like giving in. You don't know—or perhaps you do—what my isolation has been this summer. I am crying now so that I can scarcely see the page."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, September 4th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., July 23rd, 1901.

## A SOLITARY SUMMER

The enforced separation affected Lady Curzon as acutely as it did the Viceroy. "I do feel in my heart that in our life there is a sense of comradeship almost as great as love. A man can know a woman well because her life—consequently the interests which mould her mind and conceive her thoughts—are more or less simple. A man's life is so complex, and much of it lies outside the woman's sphere. .... But what is within her grasp has the power of making her truly happy. But take her away from it all and give her a blank six months in search of health, and she must feel that she has nearly lost her anchorage."<sup>1</sup> In the presence of her great devotion he displayed the strange—and to all but those who knew him really intimately, unexpected—humbleness of heart which has been commented on in an earlier chapter of this biography.<sup>2</sup> He spoke of his own devotion to duty and his love for her as "the two sole redeeming merits in an otherwise grim personality." He realised and frankly admitted that his ambitions in life involved "considerable self-sacrifice and some subordination" on the part of any one allied to him. And in illustration of what his ambition had already led to, he turned to the book whose poetic language always moved him so strongly—"Desire of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession"; and he added—a little inconsequently perhaps—"Thou shalt bruise them with a rod of iron and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lady Curzon, July 14th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>See Vol. I, chapter III, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, September 18th, 1901.

## CHAPTER XII

### HERCULEAN LABOURS : LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

APRIL—OCTOBER 1901

It was only the constant flow of work that made this solitary summer tolerable. "Viceroyal life is inexpressibly lonely," he once confessed to Sir S. MacDonnell, "and it is only work and duty that keep one going. There is enough in all conscience of both, and my heart is in them." There was not a Department of Government with whose work he did not keep himself in the closest possible touch; and his jealousy for the reputation of his Government led him to undertake tasks which few Viceroys would not have left to the Secretary or Member in charge of the Department concerned.

Indeed, these days provided striking examples of certain qualities and defects upon which emphasis has been laid in earlier chapters of this biography, notably, Lord Curzon's tremendous powers of work and assimilation as contrasted with his unwillingness—it amounted almost to an inability—to delegate work to others. "I say again," he wrote in a moment of irritation at some piece of work not having been carried out precisely as he had intended that it should be, "that it is no good trusting a human being to do a thing for you. Do everything yourself."<sup>1</sup> It was a subject on which he never grew tired of expatiating. "Here I am sitting in camp in the usual condition," he wrote Lady Curzon on another occasion; "the one man who has no shirt to put on and cannot therefore dress. . . . H. with his usual cleverness put my shirt into a large box instead of a small one; and B.C. with one of his flashes of genius kicked

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon in January 1901.

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

this box out of the carriage and put it into a *tecca gbarry*. Then people say—Trust to others to get things done ! In my view there is no madder philosophy in the world.”<sup>1</sup> The frequent testimony which he bore to the value of Sir Walter Lawrence’s services constitute a remarkable tribute, consequently, to the latter. “ His great knowledge of India,” he wrote on one occasion, “ his popularity with all classes, his tactfulness and charm of manner render him in many ways invaluable as a Private Secretary. In fact, as I often say, he applies a very useful and necessary foil to the more imperious characteristics of his Chief.”<sup>2</sup> But few men throughout his life were as successful as Sir Walter Lawrence in working with him in the capacity of a secretary.

During the summer of 1901 the Government of India felt themselves obliged to address the Secretary of State with a recommendation for the dismissal of an Indian Civil Servant who, while serving in a judicial capacity, had brought down upon himself the severe censure of the High Court. The draft of the Despatch submitted to the Viceroy by the Home Department for his signature at once arrested his attention. It lacked the impressiveness which he sought to impart to all State papers. “ Our Despatch is, probably, the only document which, should the case come before Parliament, the general public will at all attentively read,” he explained to the Secretary of State, “ and it should therefore be a dignified and conclusive summing up of the entire case against a Civil Servant whom we propose to you to dismiss from the service.” The case against the officer was so strong that he could see no difficulty in drawing up a statement which should be “ both calm and crushing ; but I am afraid that I shall have to do it myself, which means not only the composition of the final letter, but the perusal of the immense mass of documentary evidence which will accompany it.”<sup>3</sup> He accordingly set to work, and in due course produced a draft which was accepted “ without demur and without the suggestion even of a verbal amendment ” by his colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

Another matter into which he threw himself with characteristic

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, dated January 12th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 24th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., May 22nd, 1901.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., May 29th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

energy and thoroughness was a challenge thrown out by Mr. R. C. Dutt, a retired Indian Civil Servant of Bengali extraction, who had served with distinction in his native Province, on the subject of land assessments. In a series of open letters to the Viceroy Mr. Dutt had discussed the land policies of the various Governments in India with the object of showing that they were largely responsible for recurring famines. Such a challenge was one which Lord Curzon, with his belief in a benevolent autocracy as the form of Government best calculated to protect and promote the interests of the illiterate masses, accepted with enthusiasm; for it provided him with an opportunity of publishing to the world the beneficent character of British rule.

"I believe that we can not only meet our critics on almost every point where they have attacked us, but that we can also inaugurate great and acceptable reforms, which will place our revenue system on a platform superior to assault for many years to come. If I can carry out these plans—and my main reason for bringing Fuller into the Revenue and Agriculture Department as successor to Holderness is because of his unrivalled acquaintance with the problem—then I think that our Resolution should be a State paper of the first importance. But it will probably take us the next six months to do the thing thoroughly and well."<sup>1</sup>

He soon found, however, that Mr., afterwards Sir, Bampfylde Fuller's intimate knowledge of a very technical subject was a handicap rather than an asset in drafting the kind of Resolution that he desired. Lord George Hamilton had expressed full agreement with the view that any statement justifying the general system of land assessment throughout India should be written in language which the ordinary reader could understand. Yet when Lord Curzon came to study the draft which was submitted to him by the Department he found it "very long, very complex, very learned . . . and thoroughly confusing." He at once decided that, however great

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, May 1st, 1901.

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

the merits of the document as an erudite treatise on a complicated subject, it was altogether unsuited to the purpose for which it was required. What the Viceroy wanted—and what he was determined to have—was “a vindication of our Land Settlement and Revenue policy *urbi et orbi*, an answer to our critics and an attempt to convince a doubting public and to lay down the lines of a sustained and liberal policy in the future. “ This is the shape into which I shall endeavour to convert it ; but you may well believe that there will be many many hours of worry and labour before me ere this end has been even approximately attained.”<sup>1</sup> Later he gave the Secretary of State an idea of the hours which he found himself obliged to give to it. “ During the last five days I have not been out of the house, but have devoted something like eight hours a day to the attempt to get into shape our pronouncement upon the Land Assessment question.”<sup>2</sup> Lord George Hamilton sympathised with him—“ It is hard upon you that you should have the trouble of personally drafting the Resolution on Land Assessments ; but it will not be labour thrown away. A clear, forcible statement as much devoid of technicality as is possible, laying down comprehensive principles intelligible to anyone who reads them, is what is wanted to satisfy public and press opinion in this country.”<sup>3</sup>

As was his custom, he kept Lady Curzon informed of his progress with his laborious task. “ I have been engaged in writing our big Despatch about the question of Land Assessments in reply to Dutt and our critics,” he told her in a letter on August the 7th. “ It is the most abstruse, technical and difficult subject in the world, and here am I, a Viceroy who has only been for 2½ years in the country, having to write a great pronouncement on it because the experts are incapable of doing it for me.” And as he approached the end of his labour he experienced the keen delight which he always derived from work successfully accomplished. His powers of assimilation were as great as ever, and it was with complete confidence that he submitted the result of his toil to the experts for their opinion. “ I have at length finished my big Despatch about the Indian Land Assessments,” he wrote on August 14th. “ One of the things that

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 26th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., August 7th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Secretary of State, August 29th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

Rop<sup>1</sup> does know is land assessment, since he was a settlement officer for many years. And when I submitted my long draft to him, though he suggested some useful additions, he could not detect in it one single mistake from beginning to end. That was good."

The verdict of the other experts was equally satisfactory. "I think I told you before," he wrote to the Secretary of State in his letter of October the 30th, "that I went over the Resolution word by word with MacDonnell, our greatest existing Land Revenue authority; and that though he was in no way responsible for its preparation, he accepts every line. From our own body it goes out with the approval of Fuller, who is supposed to be the ablest Land Revenue officer of the second generation, of Rivaz, who has known settlement work in the Punjab for 30 years, and of Arundel, who has had a similar experience in Madras." He begged for it, therefore, a favourable reception. He knew that there were experts on the Secretary of State's council who were capable of writing pages of comment and criticism on every paragraph. But it was not for this that he was sending it home. On the contrary, he had drawn up the document, not for the purpose of eliciting the views of other experts, but as a ready reference to which all Parliamentary questioners and other critics might safely be referred. "The Resolution represents the unanimous views of the present Government of India, and it is the outcome of an amount of labour which I truly believe that no Viceroy will ever be found again to devote to the task."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Dutt and his friends, it need hardly be said, refused to be convinced, and in due course published a rejoinder in the shape of a small book entitled "Land Problems in India,"<sup>3</sup> in which the conclusions arrived at by Government were challenged and the advantages of a permanent settlement were urged. But upon those who were genuinely anxious to arrive at an impartial conclusion on a difficult and much discussed topic its effect was profound. It was at once recognised as a notable State document, bearing the impress of a master hand—as, indeed, the most important pronouncement

<sup>1</sup>Mr., afterwards Sir Walter, Lawrence.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, October 30th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Issued in 1903.

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

on land revenue policy since Lord Canning's famous scheme of forty years before for conferring a freehold throughout the country. But it was not merely its effectiveness as a defence against attack that elicited the applause of those who studied it with an unbiased mind. It was the broad tolerance of honest criticism respectfully offered, and the readiness to acknowledge the directions in which improvement might be effected, that attracted the particular notice of those who commented on it in the press. That the subject had never been approached by Government in a more liberal and sympathising spirit or discussed with greater candour and impartiality was widely admitted ; and it was these characteristics which stamped it in the opinion of the majority as a great State paper worthy of the finest traditions of British statesmanship. "The Resolution," declared the *Englishman*, "will be a landmark in the history of the land revenue policy of India under British rule."<sup>1</sup> The achievement was, in fact, a very remarkable one, for it not only captured the attention of the layman, but excited the enthusiasm of the expert immersed in the details of the work of settlement itself. One who had served for ten years, first as a settlement officer and then as Director of Land Records in Bengal, has told me of the altogether unexpected interest, and even excitement, with which he read the Resolution, recognising in it as he proceeded, a truly live document, which not only brought to the surface for discriminating judgment every important principle in Land Revenue policy, but showed an astonishing insight into the Revenue officer's difficulties and a determination to arrive at a solution of them. Indeed, he has given it to me as his considered judgment that the Resolution is one which not only appealed, at the time when it was issued, with extraordinary force to subordinates labouring in the fields of distant provinces, but which remains now, five and twenty years later, the greatest work on the subject which has ever been penned.<sup>2</sup>

But the dismissal of a Civil Servant and the drafting of a Despatch on land policy, though they made large encroachments on the Viceroy's time, were matters which were incidental to the pro-

<sup>1</sup>The *Englishman* of January 18th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. P. C. Lyon, C.S.I., at one time a member of the Government of Bengal and now Fellow and Treasurer of Oriel College, Oxford.

## CURZON, 1901

gramme of work which he had mapped out for himself during the Simla season of 1901. "If I can frame a good Education policy (as it is we have none at all) and sketch the outlines of a thorough and wide-reaching reform of the Police during the present summer at Simla," he wrote in a letter to Sir A. Godley, on May the 1st, "it will not be a bad season's work." And the formulation of a comprehensive educational policy must be regarded as the outstanding achievement of the summer of 1901.

Lord Curzon contemplated the result of seventy years of effort at imparting an English education to an Asiatic people with a thoughtful mind. The earliest attempts of Great Britain to introduce a system of state-aided education in India had been confined, broadly speaking, to subsidising institutions of an indigenous type at which courses of oriental studies were pursued. In 1781, Warren Hastings had founded the Calcutta Madrassah, where Muhammadans familiar with Persian and Arabic received instruction in Muslim law. In 1792, Jonathan Duncan, then Resident at Benares, had given similar encouragement to the Hindus by establishing, with the approval of Lord Cornwallis, a Sanskrit College at the religious centre of the Hindu world. The revolutionary change of policy, under which a system of Western education had been set up under the auspices of the Government, dates from the year 1835, when Lord Macaulay's famous Minute decided once and for all the controversy which had been gathering force between the Orientalists, who stood for the existing order, and the Anglicists, who urged the introduction of a Western System. From that time onward the aim which successive Governments have pursued has been that of providing for the education of the Indian peoples on lines which shall correspond as closely as circumstances will allow to those in force in Great Britain. There were to be elementary, secondary and high schools, facilities for technical instruction, and at the top of the pyramid colleges and universities. Since, in the early days of the experiment, the vernaculars were not suited to imparting instruction in modern science with its peculiar terminology, it was decided that the medium of instruction in all higher education must be English.

Such in brief was the outcome of Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835; and, while it had to be admitted that the system had been

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

responsible for some remarkable results during the seventy years of its operation, it was also clear that it had developed some very serious defects. For one thing, the pyramid had become top-heavy. Young men of the middle classes had flocked in vast numbers to the high schools and colleges—many of them ill prepared by previous training to undergo either the physical or mental strain which the university courses conducted in a foreign language imposed upon them. The pyramid had, in fact, ceased to be a pyramid at all ; for, while the high school and college classes had become unduly swollen, elementary education had languished, so that the base upon which the whole edifice ought to have rested had shrunk and become incapable of bearing the strain of the heavy superstructure. Nor was this all, for the building had become, not merely top-heavy, but lop-sided. A Despatch of the Court of Directors in 1854, which had ordained the establishment of universities, had also laid stress on the need of technical education. And the importance of practical courses for young men aspiring to business or non-literary careers had been reiterated by an influential Commission in 1882. There was, however, no enthusiasm for such training in the India of those days, and the growth of the system continued to centre round purely literary studies.

No wonder that the Viceroy, pondering upon the outcome of "the struggles, the ambitions, the achievements, the errors and the hopes " of seventy years of English education in India, declared that if he could frame a good education policy it would not be a bad season's work.

Lord Curzon had none of the ignorant prejudice which led Macaulay to record his belief that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ; and he realised that many of the defects of the system were due to the fact that we had never purged ourselves of the taint with which we had started in 1835, namely, that of insisting on " a too slavish imitation of English models."<sup>1</sup> That education should have scarcely touched the masses of the people was a grave indictment of our

<sup>1</sup>This and the subsequent quotations in this chapter, except where otherwise specified, are from the Minute drawn up by Lord Curzon and delivered in the form of a speech at the opening of the Simla Educational Conference, in September 1901.

policy. It could not be a right thing, he declared, that three out of every four country villages should be without a school, or that more than four-fifths of the boys of school-going age should be without even primary education. Here, too, he divined the root cause of failure. "Ever since the cold breath of Macaulay's rhetoric passed over the field of the Indian languages and Indian textbooks, the elementary education of the people in their own tongues has shrivelled and pined." He was very far from sharing the contempt for the vernaculars which had vitiated the judgment of some of the most prominent of the Anglicists of Macaulay's day. "If the vernaculars contained no literary models, no classics, I might not be so willing to recommend them. But we all know that in them are enshrined famous treasures of literature and art; while even the secrets of modern knowledge are capable of being communicated thereby in an idiom and in phrases which will be understood by millions of people to whom our English terms and ideas will never be anything but an unintelligible jargon." He quickly came to the conclusion that something definite must be done to put elementary education on a sounder footing.

From the shrunken base of the pyramid he turned his gaze to its higher levels. He found secondary schools existing in large numbers, and formed the opinion that Government should aim at withdrawing as much as possible from the direct management of such schools, being careful to regard its own institutions, not as competitors with State-aided schools under private management, but as models which should set the standard to be aimed at.

The cause of technical education seemed to him to have suffered from lack of clear thinking, both on the part of the public and of Government. There seemed to be a vague general idea that in technical education would be found the economic regeneration of the country. "Technical Education is to resuscitate our native industries, to find for them new markets and to recover old, to relieve agriculture, to develop the latent resources of the soil, to reduce the rush of our youths to literary courses and pursuits, to solve the economic problem and generally to revive a *Saturnian age*." The Government of India had been caught up in the same stream of anxious interest but uncertain thought along which these optimistic

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

expectations had been borne. "The autumnal leaves are not more thickly strewn in Vallambrosa than the pigeon-holes of our Departments are filled with Resolutions on the subject inculcating the most specious and unimpeachable maxims in the most beautiful language." Where thought was fluid it was scarcely to be expected that action would be consistent or strong ; "and where every dreamer expects to find in a particular specific the realisation of his own dream, there are certain to be more disappointments than successes." Inquiries had shown that the industrial schools which had been established were largely engaged in teaching carpentry and smithy-work to boys who never intended to be carpenters or blacksmiths. "If technical education is to open a real field for the youth of India, it is obvious that it must be conducted on much more business-like principles."

But of all the aspects of the educational problem, it was that of the universities that most astonished and perplexed him. The Indian university was the very antithesis of the type which constituted his own ideal. Modelled on the University of London, it had acquired in an accentuated degree all the features which distinguished its prototype from the older residential universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The corporate life which was so valuable a feature of the latter was wholly lacking in the Indian institution. It was not even a collection of buildings ; it was "scarcely even a site." It was merely a body controlling courses of study and setting examination papers to the pupils of affiliated colleges scattered over immense geographical areas. Neither did the colleges themselves possess the features to which the Viceroy attached so much importance. They were not residential institutions "with a history, a tradition, a *genius loci*, a tutorial staff of their own." They were, in fact, little more than collections of lecture rooms and laboratories.

The universities thus constituted had become absorbed in the discharge of a single function—that of examining the stream of youths that flowed from the high schools to the colleges and on to the haven of the university degree. With the whole course of university training dominated by the examination, the primary object of education had been lost to view, and cramming had been elevated to the level of a high art. This fatal misdirection of energy

## CURZON, 1901

called forth Lord Curzon's unstinted denunciation. "We examine our boys from childhood to adolescence, and we put a pass before them as the *summum bonum* of life." The effect upon the rising generation was deplorable. It was no use turning out respectable clerks and minor officials, if this was done at the expense of the intellect of the nation. A people could not be expected to rise in the scale of intelligence by the cultivation of memory alone. "And yet we go on sharpening the memory of our students, encouraging them to the application of purely mnemonic tests, stuffing their brains with the abracadabra of geometry and physics and algebra and logic, until after hundreds, nay thousands, have perished by the way, the residuum who have survived the successive tests emerge in the Elysian fields of the B.A. degree." What this residuum amounted to was dramatically demonstrated by statistics, which showed that of the thousands of young men who sat for the matriculation examination of the various universities, only one in seventeen ultimately took a degree. "Some might argue," declared Lord Curzon, "that tests which admit of so many failures must be too hard. I am disposed to ask whether the preceding stages are not too easy." And his conclusion was that it was out of this furrow that Indian education must at all costs be lifted before it had been finally dragged down and choked in the mire.

He did not suppose that it would be possible to create by a stroke of the pen an Indian Oxford or an Indian Cambridge; but something might, surely, be done to modify by degrees the extreme features of a purely examining university and to remove the impediments which stood in the way of the ultimate realisation of a happier ideal. Much certainly might be done to improve the composition of the bodies which were responsible for the administration of these astonishing institutions. They were unwieldy and they were filled in the main by persons whose interests were not primarily educational. In an Address at the annual Convocation of the Calcutta University, on February the 16th, 1901, he had hinted delicately at the unsuitability of the manner in which Fellowships in India were ordinarily filled, by quoting his own experience as a Fellow of All Souls College at Oxford—"I had to satisfy certain standards before I could stand as a Fellow at all. I was not merely

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

appointed *bonoris causa*, still less because I had canvassed the votes of the electors. I was not given a distinction that endured for a lifetime, irrespective of whether I took any interest in the work or not. My honour was, in fact, academic, terminable and charged with a definite obligation. It was not titular, indefinite and irresponsible."

With regard to education generally, he thought that the system had suffered from lack of central control. He observed a conflict of aims which the local conditions of separate Provinces or areas did not justify.

" In the praiseworthy desire to escape centralisation at Head-quarters we appear to have set up a number of petty kingdoms, a sort of Heptarchy in the land, whose administration in its freedom and lack of uniformity reminds me of the days of the Hebrew judges, when there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Elasticity, flexibility, variety our system must have. But it will lose half its force if they are not inspired by a common principle or directed to a common aim."

So he urged the creation of a Directorship General of Education, whose occupant would act as an expert adviser to the Government of India and would help to secure that community of principle and of aim which was so imperatively needed. He had no wish to turn the universities into a Department of the State or "to fetter the colleges and schools with bureaucratic handcuffs." Neither did he aim at creating an Imperial Education Department, " packed with pedagogues and crusted with officialism." But he could not disavow the responsibility of the Government of India for the living welfare of the multitudes that had been committed to its care. In Lord Curzon's day in India there was very emphatically a king in Israel.

The subject which the Viceroy had thus been passing in review was a vast one ; in many respects it was a technical one. He perceived clearly enough the broad defects from which the system suffered, and he had little doubt in his own mind of the general lines along which reform must proceed. But he realised the importance both of strengthening his own hands and of disarming opposition—at any rate from official quarters—by securing expert co-operation.

## CURZON, 1901

He therefore decided to summon a conference of the highest educational officers of Government throughout India and of representatives of the universities to discuss the whole question round a table at Simla. He was equally alive to the importance of guarding against the suspicion and dislike with which the educated public in India would almost certainly view any attempt to tighten official control over the educational institutions of the country, and he was careful to explain in the course of the speech with which he opened the conference that he had no intention of seizing the educational machinery of the land by any *coup de main* behind the back of the people. "We are not met here," he told those assembled at the conference table, "to devise a brand new plan of educational reform which is to spring fully armed from the head of the Home Department and to be imposed *nolens volens* upon the Indian public." He claimed with justice that concealment had never been any part of his policy, and he assured them that the education of the people was the last subject with which he would think of dealing in secrecy. The deliberations of the conference would be informal and confidential; but the outcome of their discussions would be freely submitted to the educated sections of the outside public for opinion.

The speech which opened with this declaration was in reality a comprehensive and elaborate Minute, in which he surveyed the whole field covered by the educational problem. It was a striking example of the powers of lucid analysis and effective presentation which he possessed in so high a degree. It was, further, a model of tactful exposition and persuasive appeal. It was the outcome of an immense amount of careful thought and patient investigation. "I have had a laborious week," he wrote on August the 21st, "for I am preparing for the Educational Conference which I have summoned to meet here on September the 1st."<sup>1</sup> It was addressed as much to the outside educated public as to the experts sitting round the conference table. And he had the satisfaction of finding that it was successful—temporarily at least—in disarming the criticism which he had feared his method of procedure might evoke. "The speech which I made on the opening day," he told the Secretary of State, "has been received with singular unanimity, and I may

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon.

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

also say enthusiasm, by the Native press." It was not until later, when the recommendations of the Commission which he found it necessary to appoint to report on the universities seemed to tend towards officialising those institutions, that the inevitable storm of agitation broke.

The strain imposed upon the Viceroy by these labours was, perhaps, the severest to which he had yet subjected himself.

"I may not be able to write to you at quite the usual length this week," he told Lady Curzon in his letter of September the 4th, "since I am exhausted and rather run down. I have the Educational Conference sitting in Simla . . . and every day I drive down to P.W.D. and take the chair from 11 to 2; home to lunch, then conference again from 3 to 5.30. I have to guide everything, frame all the resolutions and practically talk the whole time. It is most tiring, and with all my work on the top of it, it is almost too much. Then lately I have had serious pains all down my right leg, particularly between the knee and ankle. Just now they are paining me greatly, and I cannot stand for more than about two minutes at a time. . . . It all means overstrain. When this conference is over I shall go to bed for a week and recover."

The conference sat six hours a day continuously for a fortnight and passed without a dissentient voice no less than a hundred and fifty resolutions, every one of which was drafted by the Viceroy himself. Lord George Hamilton, who had had as much experience as anyone of Lord Curzon's tremendous powers of work, was frankly amazed at this latest exhibition of them.

"The conduct and conclusions of the Educational Conference is a piece of work which would tax the energies, both physical and mental, of a Hercules. I hear from other sources that your management and handling both of the questions in discussion and of the members present, was masterly, and that to you alone is the credit due of having accomplished the unique feat of getting twenty educationalists to sit round a table and agree with practical unanimity to 150 resolutions

## CURZON, 1901

which in the aggregate touch and remodel almost every conceivable branch of education.”<sup>1</sup>

The achievement did, indeed, provide a remarkable illustration of the extent to which the personality of the Viceroy towered over those of everyone in India and dominated the whole field of Indian Government.

Some of the recommendations of the conference bore immediate fruit. A Director General of Education was appointed in 1902, the first occupant of the new post being Mr. H. W. Orange, an official of the Education Office in London. Other reforms came into operation more slowly. As a result of the Report of the Universities Commission of 1902 legislation was undertaken in 1904 which tightened the control of Government over all higher education; reorganised the governing bodies of the universities; invested them with teaching powers; laid down conditions to be observed by all colleges seeking affiliation to a university; required, amongst other things, that every college should be under the control of a governing body, in which representatives of the teachers must be included, that hostel accommodation should be provided for such students as did not reside with their parents or guardians, and that the whole of the college income should be expended upon the purposes for which these institutions ostensibly existed.

This latter provision was intended to bring to an end the evils of the profit-making proprietary college, and was a potent cause of the bitter hostility which the reforms evoked. But the main ground on which the Indian public based its opposition to the proposed changes was that their effect must be to convert the universities into a Department of the State. It was on these grounds that the Universities Bill was assailed by Mr. G. K. Gokhale during its passage through the Legislative Council. The prospect of a real reform of the educational system had been welcomed by the Indian public. But he could not look upon the Bill as anything but a retrograde measure, which cast an unmerited aspersion on the educated classes of the country and was destined to perpetuate “the narrow, bigoted and inexpensive rule of experts.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated October 17th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Speech on the final stage of the Bill, on March the 21st, 1904.

## LAND POLICY AND EDUCATION

That the control of Government would be tightened and its powers of supervision increased was true enough—indeed, it was the opinion of yet another Commission appointed to report on the University of Calcutta in 1917 that the Act of 1904 left the Indian universities, in theory, though not in practice, among the most completely governmental universities in the world. But what Lord Curzon realised, and what his critics were determined never to admit, was that without the direct intervention of the State there was little prospect of any reform being undertaken at all. “Our educational problem is nearly as thorny here as yours has been at home,” he told Lord Northbrook, in a letter dated April the 2nd, 1903. “For, whereas all shades of opinion implored me two years ago to reform, now that reform is taking shape everyone finds that the *status quo* is incapable of improvement.”

In Bengal, where the system had taken its strongest hold, popular feeling displayed itself in a storm of passionate denunciation. In the Indian press Lord Curzon was accused in language of hysterical extravagance of ringing the death knell of all higher education. From “the greatest of Viceroy’s,” for an extension of whose term of office these same writers had only recently been clamouring, he became a sinister figure whose every action constituted a menace to the cherished aspirations of the Indian peoples. “The Town Hall and the Senate Hall of the University,” he told the Secretary of State, on September the 10th, 1902, “have been packed with shouting and perspiring graduates, and my name has been loudly hissed as the author of the doom of higher education in India.” Lord Curzon was not to be deterred, however, by opposition which he believed to be factious and which he was satisfied was in any case ill founded; and in due course the Universities Bill, after being subjected to discussion lasting over a period unprecedented in the proceedings of the Legislative Council, became law.

One would like to think that labour so great, inspired by ideals so high as those by which the Viceroy had been actuated, had met with a commensurate reward. But with the period which elapsed before the system of higher education came once more under the scrutiny of a Commission open to view, truth compels the admission that the changes actually brought about were small out of all

proportion either to the amount of time and thought which the Viceroy had devoted to them or to the violence of the opposition with which they had been assailed. Important improvements in matters of detail were undoubtedly effected ; but in its broad outline the system of higher education remained much as it had been before. The Commission of 1902 assumed that the affiliating system had come to stay. It did not contemplate the possibility of a radical reconstruction of the existing organisation, but aimed rather at a rehabilitation and strengthening of it. It failed to foresee that, in the circumstances prevailing in India, the strengthening of the system might also further encourage the tendencies which it had developed in its unregenerate days. This is indeed what happened. The rush of students to the literary courses which the universities provided was not checked, but rather stimulated. By 1917 the number of candidates for the matriculation examination of the Calcutta University alone had reached the amazing figure of sixteen thousand. A graphic picture of the situation was painted by the Commission of that year, under the distinguished chairmanship of Dr., afterwards Sir, Michael Sadler, whose services Lord Curzon had himself been anxious to secure as his first Director General of Education fifteen years before.

The summing up of the situation by the Sadler Commission provides a measure of the difficulties with which all reform in India is hedged around. That "an effective synthesis between college and university was still undiscovered when the reforms of 1904 had been worked out to their conclusion" ; that "the foundation of a sound university organisation had not yet been laid," and that "the problems of high school training and organisation were unresolved" :—such conclusions constitute a sufficiently depressing epitaph, surely, upon the tombstone of so much aspiring and strenuously prosecuted endeavour.

<sup>1</sup>Report of the Calcutta University Commission, 1917-19, Vol. I, chapter III, paragraphs 93 and 94.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MANIPUR AND BURMA

OCTOBER—DECEMBER 1901

IN a letter to Sir Clinton Dawkins, Lord Curzon declared that the summer of 1901 had been the heaviest which he had yet had in India. The strain imposed upon him by the Educational Conference had, in fact, been more than he could stand ; and before the end of September he was obliged to retire to bed in search of relief from the pain which he was experiencing in his back and leg. He mended slowly, recovery being retarded by insomnia, and he was still prostrate when, early in October, a crisis arose across the Indian frontier, which added anxiety to the exhaustion from which he was suffering. At eight o'clock on the morning of October the 3rd, Sirdar Habibulla Khan informed the British Agent at Kabul that his father, Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan, was dead. The news reached the Viceroy on the 7th and was at once telegraphed to the Secretary of State. "And so the blow has fallen and the great crisis has arrived," he wrote two days later. "I have always had a sure premonition that it would happen in my day."

Uncertainty and the shadow of civil war always hung darkly over the land when the Afghan throne became vacant, and Lord Curzon weighed up the probabilities of peace and war. Abdur Rahman had ruled with a rod of iron. His policy of cruelty and of extermination where those who did not love or sufficiently fear him were concerned, must, he felt sure, have given rise to many smouldering antipathies. Some of the tribes, too, had little love for the Barukzais. On the other hand, Habibulla, as he had seen him when a guest at

## CURZON, 1901

Kabul some years before, was amiable, respected and popular, and might be counted on to introduce the more merciful and humane dispensation for which many craved after the ruthless rule of Abdur Rahman. And taking everything into consideration, he thought the chances of a peaceful succession were good. In any case, he was prepared for any emergency that was likely to arise. Mobilisation plans were ready for an advance from Quetta and Peshawar, and troops could be pushed forward along both lines without delay. He was naturally anxious to avoid taking any action which might suggest either uneasiness or an intention to advance—an anxiety which was entertained even more strongly by the Secretary of State, who telegraphed instructions that no forward movement was in any circumstances to be made without the approval of His Majesty's Government, and that any communication which the Viceroy might think of making to Habibulla should be first submitted to him for his concurrence.

Lord Curzon's estimate of probabilities fortunately proved correct ; and on October the 10th he received a letter from Habibulla himself, informing him that he had been accepted by the army and people as the lawful Sovereign of Afghanistan. " My duty," he added, " is to act and behave in the same manner as my revered father used to do, and I will be a friend of his friends and avoid his enemies." The Russian Government, whose Ambassador in London was at once informed that His Majesty's Government were prepared to recognise Habibulla and desired nothing more than that the *status quo* should be preserved, showed no signs of moving, and with further reassuring news filtering through from Afghanistan, the Viceroy felt himself at liberty to proceed with the tour which he had planned across Assam and Manipur to Burma. Later on, when Habibulla had had time to consolidate his position, there would be important matters to discuss with him. The Viceroy was in no mood to tolerate under a new *regime* the sort of relations between the Government of India and the ruler of Afghanistan which had grown up under the astute manipulation of Abdur Rahman. He contemplated the despatch of a Mission to revise and regulate the political relations between the two countries. But he did not wish to rush matters. There

## MANIPUR AND BURMA

was just a possibility that Habibulla himself might wish to let it be seen that he had Great Britain behind him. "In such a case I do not say that we ought to be coy," he told the Secretary of State. Otherwise his advice was to see how things in Afghanistan shaped before deciding on the next step to be taken.

His tour took him across a little-known tract of country lying between Assam and Burma. He had been resting on his back for the greater part of a month, and his leg still gave him a good deal of pain when he set out from Simla. He was even doubtful if he would be able to carry through the journey which lay before him. Change of scene and mode of life, however, proved beneficial, and before he had been on tour for many days he was able to report improvement. "Since I left Simla my leg is getting better. But I have to be very tender with it still, and cannot walk for more than 200 to 300 yards."<sup>1</sup> He and his party rode on small, surefooted Manipur ponies, travelling all day through magnificent tropical jungle which clung to the sides of range after range of verdant hills. On the 10th of November he crossed the frontier of the State of Manipur and the old delight which he derived from Asiatic travel surged up. "I am writing to you from a locality from which no Viceroy has ever before written a letter," he boasted to the Secretary of State.

At Imphal, the capital, he addressed a great gathering of the people, and told them why he, the representative of the great King, had come so far from the beaten track to visit their little-known country. He had done so partly for his own satisfaction, in order that he might study their requirements at first hand, but also because he was beyond all things anxious to bring home to the minds of the people in the remotest corners of the British Empire that the arm of the Government was long enough to reach them and strong enough to secure for them the blessings of peace and order; and, further, that when they themselves spoke of the Sirkar, they were alluding not merely to a dim and intangible force, "but to a concrete authority and living persons."

These allusions to the reality of Government were made of deliberate purpose. Ten years before, Imphal had been the scene of a shocking tragedy. The people whom the Viceroy found "neither

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, November 11th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

warlike, nor uncivil, nor revengeful, nor hostile," had then dared to raise their hands against the authority of the Sirkar, had destroyed the Residency and had massacred a number of high British officials. "I am staying in the new Residency," he wrote on November the 15th, "built on the site of the old Residency, that was destroyed in the rebellion of 1891. Exactly opposite the window as I write, and just on the other side of the road, are the moat and fallen rampart of the Pat, or Palais enclosure, inside which Quinton, Grimwood, Skene and others were killed." He made a careful inspection of the spot where Grimwood had been speared while mounting the steps to the Durbar Hall ; the room in which Quinton and Skene had been chained before being taken out to be decapitated in front of the great dragons, and the site where the guilty Manipur Prince had subsequently been hanged in the presence of twenty thousand people. The picture of it which he conjured up sank into his mind so that he could not put it from him. He watched the polo, the races, the wrestling and the barbaric dances which had been arranged for his entertainment ; "but behind all this phantasmagoria of savagery and good humour," he told Lady Curzon, "hung in my own mind the perpetual cloud of the great tragedy of 1891." He could not understand how a peaceful agricultural people had been goaded to such excesses ; and his study of the history of the episode led him to the conclusion that it would always remain "one of the most astonishing incidents as well as one of the most appalling blunders of history."

Manipur had quickly been awakened from its nightmare, and for the past ten years peace had reigned supreme. As a result of British influence, Lord Curzon reminded those assembled in Durbar, forced labour had been abolished, domestic slavery had come to an end, a new and less onerous system of taxation and land revenue had been introduced, roads had been made and bridges built. "The Hill Tribes are peaceful and contented," he declared ; "each man is safe in his own home ; and if some old Manipuri of 50 or even 20 years ago were to come back from the spirit world, he would say—'This is a new and a happier Manipur.'"

Yet, in spite of this happy state of things, Lord Curzon was amazed to find traces of the baneful activities of the Military

## MANIPUR AND BURMA

Department. On going over the Palace enclosure in search of ruins of historical and antiquarian interest he found that the few that had survived the upheaval of 1891 were about to be demolished. He demanded an explanation, and he described the result in a letter to the Secretary of State. The buildings were to be pulled down, it appeared, because they would be on the glacis of the new fort.

"New fort—I gasped in amazement. What on earth is that? Would you believe it, these military people have gone and decided to build a great new fort to cost six lakhs in Manipur. Here are these Manipuris, the most good-natured, harmless, though excitable, people in creation, who were only driven into a revolt against us by a series of blunders almost unparalleled in history. We crushed them, we have disarmed them; we have built enormous barracks and planted a native regiment there; they have not got a kick left in their wretched body; and now our military wiseacres are going to overawe them with a first-class fort. Indeed, I discovered that the only reason why this structure had not yet been created has been that at the last moment the plans were condemned because they did not provide for steel shutters and machioulis!"

Like so many other projects of a similar nature which Lord Curzon had brought to an untimely end since first setting foot in India as Viceroy, that for building a great fort at Imphal was quietly buried.

From Manipur the Viceroy proceeded to Burma, a land of magnificent possibilities, which developed somewhat slowly owing to "a certain torpor, the result partly of an enervating climate," which seemed to him to hang rather heavily over the scene. After travelling from north to south *via* Mandalay and Rangoon, he bade farewell to this outlying Province of the Indian Empire from Moulmein, "one of the prettiest places that I have ever seen; rather out of the way, a little bit in a backwater with a certain picturesque slatternliness and somewhat deficient in go and energy,"<sup>1</sup> but loyal and warm-hearted.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, December 16th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1901

The tour was, in fact, a great success. Lord Curzon's health had obviously benefited ; the demands upon him had been much less exacting than had been the case during the tour of the preceding autumn, and the journey itself had been "less protracted, and, on the whole, more picturesque." Burma appealed to him on more grounds than one. Great parts of it were still a country for the pioneer. The Southern Shan States, whose Chiefs filed past him in Durbar, comprised a territory of forty thousand square miles of fertile soil, enjoying also valuable mineral possibilities. He saw in it "one of the undeveloped assets of the future." Then the Province possessed a long land frontier—a geographical feature that always appealed so strongly to his sense of romance, that in after years, when invited to deliver the Oxford University Romanes Lecture, he chose "Frontiers" as the subject of his Address. "The Frontiers of Upper Burma," he reminded those assembled in Durbar at Mandalay, "touch those of China and Assam ; they bring the territories of Great Britain into contiguity with the Asiatic dominions of France ; they extend to the boundaries of Manipur and Assam ; and they shade away on the north into unvisited tracts, peopled by unknown and semi-savage tribes."

And last, but not least, Burma was the home of a distinctive civilisation and culture attractive in themselves and well worthy of perpetuation. Evidences of its peculiar genius were strewn over the land in the shape of its artistic and architectural monuments—"so fanciful, so ingenious and so picturesque." And within its borders still flourished "a venerable and a still famous religion, whose relics are scattered throughout the East and whose temples are among the beauties of the Oriental world." He hoped that contact with Great Britain would not destroy these distinguishing features of a great inheritance. "The most loyal subject of the King-Emperor in Burma, the Burman whom I would most like to honour, is not the cleverest mimic of a European, but the man who is truest to all that is most simple, most dutiful and of best repute in the instincts and the customs of an ancient and attractive people."

Lord Curzon's solicitude for the preservation of her ancient heritage did not end with words. He was shocked at the indifference

## MANIPUR AND BURMA

which had hitherto been displayed towards her historic buildings. He found the Queen's Palace at Mandalay occupied by the Upper Burma Club, and King Thibaw's Throne Room and Audience Hall used as a garrison church. And he drew up an elaborate and detailed Note, in which he laid down the steps which were to be taken to restore and maintain the Palace buildings, both "as a model of the civil and ceremonial architecture of the Burman kings" and as "a compliment to the sentiments of the Burman race." The whole series of buildings was to be cleared of occupation. The whitewash which had been smeared about was to be removed, and, if the crimson lacquer below had perished, the surface painted the same colour. All traces of recent occupation of the rooms of the Palace, either as official residences or as Government offices, were to be cleared up. The outside walls and platform, which in the time of the kings had been white, but which were now grey—"one of the hideous innovations of the Public Works Department"—must be restored to their original condition. He ridiculed the plea that the Burmese would be led by the preservation of the Palace to imagine that there was a chance that the monarchy might one day be restored. "Any such fanciful notion, even if it exists, cannot long survive. No one believes for a moment because we preserve and are restoring the Palace of the Moghuls at Agra that we contemplate placing that dynasty again on the throne."<sup>1</sup>

The most important question upon which the Viceroy was called upon to make a public pronouncement in Burma was that of railway construction. For some time past the advantages of two great trunk lines had been vigorously canvassed, one linking up Burma with the Indian mainland *via* Assam; the other forging its way into the heart of China, with a view to tapping the immense potential resources of Szechuan. They were schemes conceived on a large scale and designed to serve important Imperial purposes—schemes, therefore, which *a priori* might have been expected to appeal powerfully to Lord Curzon. But if, as has been shown in an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon was inclined to minimise difficulties standing in the way of a desirable end, when that

<sup>1</sup>Note by Lord Curzon, dated December 2nd, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. I, chapter XVII.

end lay in the abstract field of high politics and diplomacy, he could be remorselessly practical when faced with purely concrete issues. He had never ceased urging the Cabinet to do something to maintain the position of political and commercial supremacy which Great Britain had once enjoyed in Persia ; but which now seemed to be slipping gradually from her. Yet when at last Sir Arthur Hardinge, who had recently been sent to Tehran as Minister, put forward certain definite proposals with the approval, if not at the direct instigation, of Lord Lansdowne, they were torn to ribbons by Lord Curzon himself. Sir Arthur Hardinge urged the construction of roads in Western Persia. Lord Curzon dismissed the suggestion as "fantastic." Cart roads would be quite useless in Western Persia, he declared, since "(1) the gradients are too steep ; (2) there are no carts ; (3) there are no cart horses ; (4) the traders prefer camels and mules." An attempt to improve the existing caravan routes would be a different matter. Yet even this would be a measure of doubtful advantage. " You should remember—what no one seems to have thought of—that if you make a road up from the Gulf to Kermanshah and Hamadan, it will be a road for Russian goods to come down by as well as British goods to go up by."<sup>1</sup> And he returned to his constant cry—" What is really wanted in Persia, more than anything else, if British interests are to be protected, is a policy of the British Government."

So, too, in Burma he poured ridicule on the grandiose scheme of linking up British India by rail with the Yangtsze valley. Even if it were proved that the construction of such a railway was a physical possibility, the idea that " the wealth of Szechuan would stream down a single metre-gauge line, many miles of which would have to scale the mountains by a rack, to Rangoon, while great arterial rivers flow through the heart of the province of Szechuan itself, which are quite competent to convey its trade to and from the sea—is one, as it seems to me in the present stage of Central Asian evolution, almost of midsummer madness." He could see no possible reason even for carrying the existing railway from Lashio on to the Kunlong Ferry on the Chinese frontier, since the entire

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 18th, 1901.

## MANIPUR AND BURMA

Chino-Burmese trade was successfully transported in two dug-outs and amounted to less than one hundred tons a year. His summing up must have damped the ardour of the most enthusiastic advocate of the project. "For my own part, therefore, I cannot advise that in the pursuit of fanciful political ambitions we should use Indian money to spread eagle our railways over foreign countries and remote continents, while all the time there is lying the most splendid and lucrative field of investment at our doors. There is a good deal to be done within range of our own perch before we begin to flap our wings in distant firmaments."<sup>1</sup>

It so happened that the Secretary of State had taken up the question of the possible extension of the railway into China "rather earnestly," and that a good deal of trouble had been taken at his request in framing a reply to a memorial on the subject from the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. The Viceroy's uncompromising denunciation came, consequently, upon the India Office—as Sir A. Godley put it—"with what Wordsworth calls a shock of mild surprise." Lord Curzon replied with some impatience. "Of course I did not know, when I spificated the Mandalay-Kunlong, or rather the Kunlong-Yunnan railway, that I was putting a spoke in any India Office wheel. . . . I deliberately undertook to shatter what I believe to be a wild and dangerous hallucination; and I am amused to see that the English press, who have for years howled for this railway with the insistence of ignorance, appears to welcome with enthusiasm the demonstration of their mistake."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Reply to an Address from the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce, December 10th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, January 2nd, 1902.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

JANUARY—APRIL 1902

To the burden which the work and social duties of the Calcutta season imposed upon the Viceroy there was added at this time a good deal of anxiety arising out of events beyond the Indian frontiers. At no time since he had first landed in the country had any part of the horizon cut by the serrated outline of her long land frontier been wholly free from clouds. But now, as he cast his gaze the length of the vast arc of tumbled mountain limned in against the northern heavens, it seemed to him that in more than one direction the clouds were gathering substance.

To the perennial Persian problem, which was seldom absent from the Viceroy's mind, was now being added the definite problem of our relations with Tibet. The frontier between that country and the border state of Sikkim, the outermost bulwark of the Indian Empire in that direction, had been defined by a Convention between Great Britain and China, as the suzerain Power, in 1890 ; and regulations governing the flow of trade had been embodied in a further Agreement arrived at in 1893. To Lord Curzon's surprise and indignation, he learned that the Tibetans were playing fast and loose with the provisions of both Agreements. The boundary pillars which had been set up were overturned ; the frontier itself was ignored by the Tibetan herdsmen, who drove their flocks across the passes down into the pasture lands of Sikkim, while the frontier officials were devoting all their ingenuity to placing obstacles in the way of the smooth flow of trans-frontier trade. The Tibetans were, in fact,





Circa 1902

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

snapping their fingers with complete impunity at the might and majesty of Great Britain. The Chinese Amban, to whom Lord Curzon had applied for redress in the spring of 1899, had admitted his inability to effect a settlement. And every attempt which the Viceroy made—and he had been making them for the past three years—to enter into direct communication with the Tibetan authorities at Lhasa was foiled by the contemptuous silence of the Dalai Lama. His letters were ignored or returned unopened; he was treated, in fact, as though he were the representative of the pettiest of petty potentates, with whom it was beneath the dignity of the Dalai Lama to converse. He had some grounds, consequently, for irritation. “It is really the most grotesque and indefensible thing,” he wrote, “that at a distance of little more than 200 miles from our frontier, this community of unarmed monks should set us perpetually at defiance.”<sup>1</sup>

From being grotesque it soon became ominous, for strange rumours of the mysterious comings and goings of secret emissaries between Tibet and Russia began to filter through from beyond the mountains. So much in the dark were the Government as to what was going forward, that Lord Curzon entertained serious fears that they might wake up one morning to find a Russian protectorate over Tibet an accomplished fact. And by the summer of 1901 he thought it necessary to inform the Secretary of State of the steps which he might find himself obliged to take, if the one last effort, which he was then making, to enter into communication with the Dalai Lama failed. He expounded his proposals with lucidity and care, and with all his customary attention to detail. They rested on an assumption which he regarded as axiomatic—that where diplomacy had demonstrably failed there was no alternative but to resort to force. “Nothing can or will be done with the Tibetans until they are frightened. I should at once move a few men up to the frontier.”<sup>2</sup>

This early correspondence between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State on the subject of our relations with Tibet at once disclosed a difference between Lord Curzon and the Cabinet at home. It was a difference of a fundamental nature, which had existed from the first, not in relation to Tibet or any other specific issue only, but in

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 11th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## CURZON, 1902

relation to the foreign policy of the Government of India generally. To put it baldly,—what Lord Curzon could not obtain by negotiation he was prepared to wrest, or to attempt to wrest, by force ; what the Government at home could not secure by diplomacy they were usually ready to forego. This had been the root cause of such disagreement as had existed between George Curzon and Lord Salisbury during the former's tenure of the post of Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He refused to believe that any one who was not prepared to contemplate the employment of force in the last resort could possibly have a policy worth the name. "The whole explanation of your troubles at home," he told St. John Brodrick, "is that for years no British Minister has consented to look one yard ahead. There has been no prescience, and therefore no policy. You have none now for China, Persia, Morocco, Egypt or any place in the world. Lord Salisbury is an adept at handling the present, witness Venezuela. But the future to him is anathema."<sup>1</sup> Lord Salisbury's complaint against Lord Curzon was that he did not pause to consider whether the necessary force could conveniently be provided. "He always wants me to negotiate with Russia as if I had 500,000 men at my back," he exclaimed on one occasion ; "and I have not," he added.

The persistence of this fundamental difference was well illustrated in the voluminous correspondence about Persia in which the Viceroy had indulged from the time that he had first set foot in India. The gist of his argument, which was elaborated in countless letters, Minutes and Despatches, was summed up in two letters to St. John Brodrick. If a satisfactory agreement could be come to with Russia over Persia, well and good—though Lord Curzon was altogether sceptical of any such possibility. But if not—"then I pray you not to do nothing ; but give Russia and Persia clearly to understand that beyond a certain line we do not mean the former to go, and that within it we intend to consolidate *and at all hazards defend* British interests."<sup>2</sup> And in explanation of what he meant by the words "*at all hazards defend*," he wrote on November the 16th of the same year—"Do remember that if at any time Russia strikes in North Persia, seizes Meshed or does anything outrageous, I am

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated February 1st, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., September 20th, 1899.

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

always quite ready to strike back in Southern Persia. I would at once send a force and seize and hold Bundar Abbas, Bushire, or Mohammera, or all three. That would bring matters to a head." St. John Brodrick reminded him that the times were particularly unfavourable to a forward policy. The South African war was making serious drains on the fighting forces. " You may say that inaction spells future trouble ; but, if you were here, I doubt if you would give France, Germany and Russia a chance of coming together on anything, even if that anything were Muscat, Koweit and Bundar Abbas. Don't resent my saying this ; I am, as you know, of the forward school and am oppressed by the sometimes needless inertia ; but your views, which are well known, rather perturb Arthur and others who are as keen as yourself, because times are so difficult."<sup>1</sup>

The difference being fundamental, it was bound to disclose itself whenever any question of foreign policy affecting India became at all acute. And from the moment that Lord Curzon took up the question of Tibet it was inevitable—the circumstances being what they were—that it should develop into a question of the first importance. In his reply to the Viceroy's letter, setting forth the steps which the latter contemplated taking, the Secretary of State summed up the situation.

" . . . you propose—assuming you do not get a civil reply to your letter—to begin with a show of force, which you would convert into an actual exercise of force by proceedings which would practically be an invasion of Tibetan territory, and with the ultimate object of concluding at Lhasa some treaty with Tibet which you hope would put our relations for the future on a better foundation than they have been in the past. Now, it seems to me that the course you suggest might have the very opposite effect to what you anticipate. It may drive Tibet into the arms of Russia. . . . But, in addition to these objections, which I admit are to a large extent hypothetical, we have the material objection that just now our military establishments are not in a condition to justify any expedition of size beyond the frontiers of India."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 8th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., July 11th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1902

Such arguments left Lord Curzon cold. And ten months later, when rumour of a Russian move in the direction of Tibet again became persistent, he stated his view with all his customary emphasis. "As you probably know," he wrote in a letter to Lord George Hamilton, on May the 28th, 1902, "my answer to any such proceeding on the part of Russia, were it confirmed, would be very simple. Without the slightest delay I would put a British army into Lhasa."

In December 1901 Lord Curzon learned that his last attempt to enter into correspondence with the Dalai Lama had failed, and in January 1902 he found himself definitely faced with a Tibetan problem. "After my complete failure to get at the Dalai Lama of Tibet, we have now to decide what to do. . . . We shall presently address you, proposing to enforce the treaty line which we have allowed to be invaded and ignored for years. This is the minimum that we can undertake; and it ought to have been done long ago."<sup>1</sup> Thus, as early as the beginning of 1902, the danger of a vital disagreement between the Viceroy and the Cabinet had become something more than a hazy possibility.

It was not only over Tibet that clouds were gathering during the winter of 1901-02. In Afghanistan the situation was obscure. "Faint but hardly substantial rumours of unrest reach us from Kabul, but whether these testify to anything more serious than the normal unrest of a new and still somewhat embryonic Oriental *regime* it is difficult to learn."<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon was most anxious to discuss with the new Amir in person the future relations between them; and, with this end in view, had invited him to meet him in April at Peshawar. The reply sent by Habibulla to this invitation showed that the revision of the relations between the two countries which the Viceroy so greatly desired was going to be by no means easy of accomplishment. To begin with, the Amir denied that there had been any misunderstanding between the Government of India and his father—"a somewhat strange reading," Lord Curzon thought, "of the history of the past 20 years." Then he thought that the existing Agreement left nothing to be desired. "My kind friend,"

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, January 16th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 6th, 1902.

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

he wrote, "I am fully convinced that there is not a single thing, either big or small, omitted from the terms of the Agreement, or which would now be deserving of description or record." What need, therefore, to trouble the Viceroy with a meeting? As an agreeable illustration of friendship such a meeting might have its uses; but for the present the Amir was too busy at Kabul to be able to do himself the pleasure of suggesting a time or place.

All these anxieties preyed upon the Viceroy's mind, and, coming on top of the strain of the Calcutta season, made serious inroads on his reserves of strength. "I am almost broken down with over-work," he wrote on February the 13th, "and am going away on Saturday to Darjeeling for a fortnight. This season has been a terrible strain upon me."

He spent a quiet fortnight in Darjeeling, taking advantage of the proximity of the Political Officer in Sikkim to discuss the Tibetan difficulty with him and to instruct him how to proceed in the event of the proposals, which he had now addressed officially to the Secretary of State, being sanctioned.

But a fortnight later his restless energy was finding vent in another tour of inspection, this time in Northern Bengal.

"Some people may think Viceregal touring to be a light and easy job. After a now long experience I begin to think it one of the most tiring in the world. Take to-day. I started at 8 a.m. this morning; first an hour in a boat up a river; then an hour's drive through the dust of an unmade road; then two hours in the blazing sun, inspecting some wonderful old ruins near here, one of the many perished capitals of Bengal named Punduah; then the two hours back again; then a garden party and numerous introductions, followed by fireworks, from which I have just returned, only to start off again in three quarters of an hour's time for an official dinner; and all this with my right foot aching till it almost feels as though it would drop off. No Governor-General had been here since 1817; and thousands of people have come in who have never seen anybody higher than a Commissioner."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, dated February 25th, 1902.

## CURZON, 1902

In spite, however, of anxiety and overwork, the Viceroy found some grounds for satisfaction. The internal situation of the country provided an agreeable contrast to the darkening outlook beyond the frontiers. With a good monsoon during the previous summer, the shadow cast by two successive years of famine showed signs of lifting. And the dawn of brighter days was reflected in the Budget in the shape of a substantial surplus. Lord Curzon's Government considered anxiously the possibility of reduced taxation. They came to the conclusion that a general reduction of taxation was neither the best nor the most effective means of assisting those who had suffered most from recent scarcity. In the affected districts the collection of land revenue was heavily in arrears ; and it was decided to employ a sum not far short of £1,500,000 of the realised surplus in remitting the whole amount of the uncollected revenue. In view of the crisis through which the land had so recently passed, Lord Curzon declined to regard his Budget as a prosperity Budget. But he did emphatically claim for it that it was a poor man's Budget and a peasant's Budget. And he rejoiced at finding himself in a position to give practical proof of his sympathy with the hard hit tillers of the soil.

Other substantial sums were allotted to the Provinces in which famine had compelled a suspension of work in various directions ; and the balance of a handsome surplus was set aside for increased outlay on Public Works and sanitation, minor irrigation works, and last, but not least, upon a new and expanding programme of educational effort. He did not doubt that a cheap popularity was to be purchased by an allround reduction of taxation. But he was satisfied that the course which his Government had decided on was the right one ; and in his weekly letter to the Secretary of State he dismissed the matter in a brief half dozen lines—" Yesterday morning Law expounded his budget in the dry, metallic, nasal tones that he affects. His performances are always business-like, but are never tinged by the slightest ray of imagination. The public mind will no doubt fasten on the fact that there is no reduction of taxation, and will taunt us with only giving temporary instead of permanent amelioration to the people."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 20th, 1902.

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

This pleasing end to a season of exceptional anxiety and stress was followed by a tour from which Lord Curzon derived further satisfaction. From Calcutta he proceeded to Hyderabad, where the cordiality of his welcome exceeded his most sanguine expectations. And if the shoot which was arranged by his host for his entertainment, after the more serious business of his visit had been disposed of, was marred both by an unfortunate fatality and by the severity of the spring climate of the Deccan, the tone of his correspondence showed that he was none the less in cheerful mood. "The thermometer, my dear Godley, is 98° in this tent ; and writing to you in these circumstances loses something of its natural charm." The tragic death of an old shikari did more than the discomfort of the climate to cast a gloom temporarily over the party. Descending inadvertently from his elephant in close proximity to a tiger's rocky lair, he was killed in full view of the horrified spectators by a single blow from the paw of an infuriated animal which was upon him almost before the shouts of the spectators reached him to warn him of his danger.

Before leaving the territory of the Nizam, Lord Curzon visited the famous caves of Ajanta—the first Viceroy who had ever done so. And on his way to Peshawar, whither he was bound "to start the new province with an official benediction," he halted at Agra to see for himself the progress made with the work of restoration which he had set in train three years before. He was delighted with the change which three years of steady work had brought about. The crimes of earlier vandals had one by one been obliterated, renovation had been judiciously carried out, and the whole of the principal mosques, tombs and other historic buildings had been surrounded with exquisite gardens and parks. He had found a ready coadjutor in Sir A. MacDonnell, the Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces, within whose jurisdiction the city lay. But the actual programme of work had been dictated by Lord Curzon himself. "I have supervised and given orders upon every detail myself ; for the local engineers who have to carry them out are destitute of the faintest artistic perception ; and if left to themselves will perform horrors that alternately make one laugh and weep." He looked forward to being relieved of much of this work in future, for his

## CURZON, 1902

plea for the appointment of a Director General of Archaeology had been successful, and Mr., afterwards Sir, John Marshall who had been selected for the post, had reached Calcutta a little while before.

When Lord Curzon told the Secretary of State that he was proceeding to Peshawar to give the new Frontier Province an official benediction, he was guilty of no exaggeration. He penetrated to its innermost recesses, inspected its fortifications, probed into its problems and questioned its officers with his customary energy and acumen ; but the crowning feature of his visit was a vast Durbar at Peshawar, at which for the first time in history an English Viceroy met face to face a huge gathering of Frontier tribesmen and spoke to them direct. As a spectacle alone the assemblage was, perhaps, unique. It was a dramatic demonstration of the meeting of the power and majesty of an ordered civilisation with the primitive and virile forces of the untamed East. No one who witnessed the impressive entry of the Viceroy amid the thunder of the guns, declared a spectator of the proceedings, could fail to realise the value of ceremony and processional pomp in the eyes of an Oriental people.<sup>1</sup> The occasion was one after Lord Curzon's own heart. " You would have enjoyed the sight," he told the Secretary of State ; " 3,000 of the most unmitigated blackguards in the world—bearded faces, wild eyes, dirty clothes—all squatting on the ground in a semi-circle, absolutely silent and motionless, save when at intervals one or other rose from his place, retired from the ring to perform his evening prayer and then returned and seated himself again. Between 400 and 500 of the leading men passed before me and offered their *nuzzurs*, or tendered the hilts of their swords."<sup>2</sup> His speech, which was subsequently read in Pashtu and distributed broadcast, was a frank and courageous statement of the attitude of Government towards the frontier tribes. It was designed to dissipate the host of false rumours which had attended the formation of the new Province and to reassure the tribes as to the intentions of Great Britain.

Before leaving the Frontier the Viceroy and Lady Curzon travelled up the Khyber Pass to the limit of British territory and slept a night in the newly-built serai at Landi Kotal, escorted and guarded exclusively by Afridi militia.

<sup>1</sup>Writing in the *Pioneer* of May 9th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated April 30th, 1902.

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

From his tour Lord Curzon carried away two very definite impressions. His contact with Colonel Deane satisfied him that he was the ideal ruler for the new Province. "Modest, cool, alert, well-balanced, a master of his subjects and his men . . . it is obvious that he inspires both affection and respect."<sup>1</sup> His journey up the Khyber set in motion another train of thought. "I see very clearly," he wrote, "that we must make the Mullagori road next winter. Too many of our eggs are now in the Afridi basket. In the event of a movement of troops into Afghanistan they have us in their hands and can almost exact their own terms."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, dated April 30th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XV

### THE QUESTION OF BERAR

APRIL 1902

LORD CURZON's visit to Hyderabad was no mere conventional courtesy. On the contrary, it was marked by results of great political importance. It is not too much to say, indeed, that within a period of twenty-four hours he succeeded, contrary to all expectations, in bringing about a revolutionary change in the relations between the Government of India and the Nizam. When he had first reached India he had found the Nizam sullen and suspicious. There were various reasons for his hostility. Maladministration had compelled the Government of India to look somewhat closely into the affairs of his State ; and he had resented the interference. But altogether, apart from differences arising out of the internal administration of the premier Native State in India, there was the standing grievance of Berar. And it was to the question of Berar that Lord Curzon instinctively turned in his search for means of bringing about improvement in the relations between this important feudatory and the suzerain Power.

The Berar question in the shape in which it presented itself to Lord Curzon dated back to the year 1853, when the districts of that name were assigned by Treaty to Great Britain. But before the days of Lord Dalhousie, by whom the Treaty of 1853 was drafted, it had behind it a long history under Company rule which had its origin as far back as 1766, when the East India Comany first entered into definite Treaty relations with the State of Hyderabad. The Treaty of 1766 was the outcome of joint action against the French, and was

## THE QUESTION OF BERAR

followed at varying intervals by other Treaties and Agreements, all directed to securing joint action against common foes. Thus, in 1790 a new Treaty was concluded to meet the threatened attack of Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, and in 1789 and 1800 further Treaties of Alliance were entered into in face of the challenge of the Marathas. The basis of these several Treaties and Agreements was co-operation on the part of the Nizam in the wars which marked the gradual consolidation of the Company's possessions ; and, on the Company's side, the organisation of a force officered by British soldiers, for the dual purpose of maintaining the Nizam's authority within the confines of his own dominion and of further assisting the Company in the wars in which it was constantly embroiled. Thus, a body of troops known as the Subsidiary Force came into existence under the provisions of the Treaty of 1766 ; and to this a further force, which came to be known as the Hyderabad Contingent, was added during the opening years of the nineteenth century. The cost of this latter force was made a first charge upon the revenue of that part of the Nizam's possessions known as the Berars ; and, but for the financial difficulties in which his Government subsequently became involved, the Berar question would never have arisen.

During the years that followed, however, financial disorder led to serious arrears in the payment of the force and, as a consequence, to large advances from the Company, which by the middle of the nineteenth century had claims outstanding against the Nizam's Government amounting to £700,000. Such were the circumstances which led to the Treaty of 1853, under the provisions of which the debt to the Company was discharged and the Hyderabad Contingent —to be, as formerly, at the disposal of the Nizam in times of peace and of the Company in the event of war—was taken over by the Indian Government in return for the assignment, for so long as might prove necessary, of certain districts, including the Berars. The assigned territory, while remaining subject to the Nizam's sovereignty, was to be administered by the British Resident at Hyderabad ; and any surplus from its revenues, after the charges for which it had been assigned had been met, was to be paid over to the Nizam. Some modification to the Treaty to the advantage of the Nizam was effected in 1860 ; but the situation with which Lord

## CURZON, 1902

Curzon was called upon to deal with substantially that created by the Treaty of 1853.

During all these years the relations between the two allies had been anything but cordial—a state of affairs for which neither party could claim immunity from blame. For if there had been times when the Nizam's Government had failed the Company and had disregarded its advice and wishes, it must freely be admitted that the Company had driven hard bargains with the Nizam and had not always been over scrupulous in its dealings. Lord Curzon's view was that though words in the Treaties could be quoted which would fairly cover everything that had been done, yet there were passages in the history of the relations between the Company and the Nizam which were not in strict accordance with the most scrupulous standards of British honour.

The Treaties of 1853 and 1860 had regularised and improved the position ; but they had left a sore and bitter feeling, excited by the spectacle of the Government of India in occupation of territory belonging to the Nizam. Lord Curzon did not look upon the complete rendition of Berar as possible. Lord Salisbury had already refused a request for its restoration submitted to him when Secretary of State for India in 1878; and the reasons against handing back the district in 1878 were infinitely stronger now. We had, in fact, acquired prescriptive rights there by fifty years of beneficent administration, which we could not now be asked, and would certainly not consent, to sacrifice. The question, therefore, resolved itself into this—Could any arrangement be discovered which would render our continued occupation of Berar less distasteful to the Nizam ? Lord Curzon was of opinion, not only that some such arrangement could be devised, but that it could be accompanied by conditions which would be financially advantageous to Hyderabad.

Under the Treaties in force, Berar was administered as an independent unit by a Commissioner and cadre of officials responsible to the British Resident at Hyderabad. Similarly, the Hyderabad Contingent was organised as a separate military unit with its own Headquarters Staff, having a Major General at its head, who was also responsible in the last resort to the British Resident at Hyderabad. In each case great savings could obviously be effected and a far

## THE QUESTION OF BERAR

higher standard of efficiency attained if they were absorbed, the one in the general administration of an adjoining British province, the other in adjacent Commands of the Indian army. Proof of the wastefulness of the existing system was furnished by statistics. For whereas Berar had been made over to satisfy military charges which stood at the time at thirty-two lakhs of rupees, and whereas the revenue from it had risen to 119 lakhs a year, yet the surplus due to the Nizam had never exceeded Rs 19,73,000 in any one year since the Treaty of 1860, and during the period of forty years which had since elapsed had averaged something less than nine lakhs a year.

There was another factor to be taken into consideration. Two years of famine had added to the financial embarrassment of the State. To meet this fresh drain upon his resources the Nizam had borrowed from the Government of India in 1900 a sum of two crores of rupees, and had accepted a further advance of 141 lakhs to meet the cost of famine in Berar. Any fresh arrangement, therefore, which would at one and the same time bring additional revenue into the Nizam's depleted treasury, and render the occupation of Berar by the Government of India less galling to his *amour propre*, must presumably prove agreeable to him.

Such an arrangement seemed to Lord Curzon to be well within the range of what was practicable. Briefly, his proposals were that the Hyderabad Contingent should be absorbed into the Indian army, which would then become responsible for retaining a limited number of troops in Hyderabad ; and that Berar, while remaining under the sovereignty of the Nizam, should be amalgamated for all purposes of administration with the Central Provinces. It was an important part of his scheme that the economies thus effected should be balanced by a fixed payment to the Nizam of twenty-five lakhs a year in place of the small and varying surplus which he had hitherto received. This sum was to be regarded as the rent of the Berar districts, which would henceforth be leased in perpetuity to the Government of India. In this way the latter, from playing the part of a bailiff in execution, would figure in the far less obnoxious role of tenant to the Nizam's landlord. An incidental advantage of the scheme was that it would enable the Nizam to free himself within a reasonable

period of time of the debt which he had just contracted, since a fixed proportion of the rent could be deducted annually until capital and interest had been paid off.

A settlement on these lines appeared to Lord Curzon to be most generous to the Nizam and to Hyderabad—"to both of whom, perhaps, we owe some reparation."<sup>1</sup> But he claimed for it also that it would be highly advantageous to Great Britain, "since, with no great sacrifice, and with the prospect of early financial gain, we shall have laid the Berar ghost for ever."<sup>2</sup> He was both surprised and mortified, therefore, on learning from the Resident, Colonel, afterwards Sir, David Barr, whom he had instructed to sound the Nizam on the subject, that the reply of the latter was a blunt refusal. And it was in no very hopeful frame of mind, consequently, that he left Calcutta at the end of March to carry out his promised visit. "I was hoping to go down and make a public announcement at the State Banquet upon the successful completion of our Berar negotiations. The failure of them deprives my visit of a good deal, both of its eclat and of its pleasure. Barr writes to Lawrence in great tribulation as to its failure."<sup>3</sup>

On reaching Hyderabad, however, he was given to understand that the Nizam would welcome an early opportunity for a private interview, and he invited him to visit him the following day. In the course of the discussion that ensued the Nizam explained that so long as there was the smallest chance of the complete restoration to him of the occupied territory he would not feel justified in entering into any fresh Agreement. If he learned from the Viceroy's own lips that no such chance existed, he would gladly accept the solution of the question which the Viceroy offered him. Lord Curzon experienced little difficulty in satisfying him on the point, and from that moment all doubt as to the successful issue of the negotiations disappeared. Lord Curzon was, of course, aware that so sudden and complete a *volte face* on the part of the Nizam would not be unlikely to excite the suspicion that he had brought undue pressure to bear upon him. And he hastened to reassure the Home Government upon the point. "Now, pray do not think," he begged the Secretary of

<sup>1</sup>Minute by Lord Curzon, September 25th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon to the Secretary of State, March 27th, 1902.

## THE QUESTION OF BERAR

State, "that the Nizam yielded out of personal deference to me, or from weakness, or in alarm. He yielded in deference to my arguments and because he is firmly convinced that I am a friend to him and his State. Nor need you be afraid of any remorse or regret on his part. I venture to assert that at this moment he is the most contented man in Hyderabad."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon certainly attached great importance to the settlement. "I have had a great triumph here," he wrote to Sir S. MacDonnell, on April the 10th, "for I have settled the famous Berar question, which has been a standing sore between Hyderabad and ourselves for 50 years. The districts are now assigned to us for certain purposes by Treaty. I have persuaded the Nizam to lease them to us in perpetuity. In a way this is the biggest thing I have yet done in India. But who at home knows of Berar?" Perhaps he gave too little credit to people in England for the interest and intelligence with which they followed his work in India. Amongst the *cognoscenti* the delicacy and difficulty of his negotiations with the Nizam were fully realised. "We shall await with great interest your account of your proceedings and of your proposed Agreement with regard to Berar," Sir A. Godley wrote, on April the 11th. "You will easily have read between the lines of our communications that the idea of your taking up that thorny question fluttered our political dovecote very seriously. But all's well that ends well; and if things turn out as seems probable, you will have scored a real personal triumph." And when fuller information reached England, Lord George Hamilton wrote in terms of the highest admiration—"There is nothing that you have done in India which is more indicative of your power over individuals, and your ability to break through the meshes and toils of generations of chicanery and intrigue, than your success in these negotiations. As far as I could gather, the only objection that any of the Political Committee here entertained to your undertaking this task was their firm conviction that no one could succeed."<sup>2</sup>

And recognition of a notable success was by no means confined to official circles. When in due course the new Treaty of November the 5th, 1902, came into being, its importance was widely recognised.

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 2nd, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated May 1st, 1902.

## CURZON, 1902

It was freely admitted that no more satisfactory settlement of a long standing controversy could have been devised, and the achievement was placed high among the great public services rendered to India during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty.<sup>1</sup> Such criticism as there was emanated in the main from the Native press, which pretended to see in the Agreement a new form of attack on the autonomy of the Native States, any general application of which would reduce their rulers to the position of pensioners and their territories to the level of British Provinces. But such comment was too transparently of an *ex parte* nature to detract from the credit which Lord Curzon deserved and was freely given.

Incidentally, the solution of the problem at which Lord Curzon had arrived set in motion a train of thought which later on was to have momentous consequences. If the boundaries of the Central Provinces were to be enlarged so as to include Berar, might it not be advisable to seize the opportunity of taking up the question of Provincial boundaries generally?

"I am not sure that this will not be a proper occasion on which to examine into the larger question of the boundaries of Local Governments, or some of them, in general. Bengal is unquestionably too large a charge for any single man. Ought Chittagong to continue to belong to it, or ought we to give Assam an outlet on the sea? Is Orissa best governed from Calcutta? Ought Ganjam to be given to Madras? My own view is that the Central Provinces will and ought to develop by sundry of these accretions into a Lieutenant-Governorship. But whether the time has now come or is nearing I cannot at present say."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps, if Lord Curzon could have divined the bitter controversy to which the answer to these questions was destined to give rise, he would have been less anxious to propound them. But in 1902 the partition of Bengal and the angry surge of feeling which it excited still lay hidden in the womb of time; and the Viceroy went forward with his questionings in happy ignorance of what the future held in store.

<sup>1</sup>*Pall Mall Gazette* of February 10th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, April 30th, 1902.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GREAT DURBAR

APRIL 1902—MARCH 1903

WHEN Lord Curzon reached Simla, in the early summer of 1902, he had been in India for nearly three and a half years. Of the major reforms which he had set before himself, all but the reorganisation of the police and the introduction of some change in the system under which judicial and executive functions were combined in the same individual had been taken up. These last two he intended dealing with during the summer of 1902. "Next year I take up judicial and executive functions and Police Reform," he had told Sir Clinton Dawkins, in a letter dated November the 16th, 1901. "And then for the remainder of my time I shall watch and water the garden which I have planted."

The prospect of Elysian ease here foreshadowed was not destined to be fulfilled. Work increased rather than diminished as time went on. The task of supervising all the arrangements for the erection of the Victoria Memorial was in itself an appreciable addition to the daily tale of bricks which, under the lash of his sense of duty—as stern a taskmaster as any that ever wielded the flail in the Land of the Pharaohs—the Viceroy was constantly striving to turn out. He also became absorbed in the arrangements for holding the great Durbar at which the accession of King Edward the VII was to be solemnised in India. The idea of a pageant such as was possible only in the East, where the circumstances of climate and the traditions of immemorial centuries were favourable to a lavish display of pomp and ceremony, appealed irresistibly to his innate love of the external trappings of existence.

But, apart from this, he saw in the circumstances of the case an opportunity of impressing upon the imagination of the Indian peoples a sense of the intimate nature of the bonds by which India and Great Britain were united. And, within a very few hours of the death of Queen Victoria, he had determined that the announcement of Her Successor's accession to the throne should be such as would leave an indelible mark upon Indian history. "At a later date," he wrote, on February the 28th, 1901, "I will discuss with you (the Secretary of State), and, of course, with His Majesty himself, the steps that will have to be taken for some great celebration of his assumption of the Crown of India." He had, in fact, in a letter to Sir Francis Knollys written on January the 24th, 1901, within forty-eight hours of his receipt of the news of the Queen's death, already thrown out the suggestion for the consideration of King Edward; and a little later, when addressing the King in person, had put forward tentatively a further and still more ambitious proposal. "I do not know if the idea has ever presented itself to Your Majesty of paying a short visit to India in the cold weather and crowning yourself Emperor of India? There would be such an outburst of loyalty as India has never seen, and the act would be one of incalculable political value."<sup>1</sup> Practical difficulties stood in the way of the King leaving England for the purpose; but he had at once expressed his approval of the Viceroy's proposal to solemnise the occasion by holding a great Durbar.

In official circles in England, however, there was a disposition to question the propriety of such a function. It was held in some quarters that it might give rise to an idea that it was only through such a ceremony that the King of England became Emperor of India, and that the Self-Governing Colonies might, consequently, be moved to demand that similar ceremonies should take place within the confines of their own dominions. Lord Curzon brushed such arguments aside. The colonial analogy was wholly beside the point. "A Durbar is a peculiarly Indian, and not a colonial, function. It is attended by forms and ceremonies immemorially consecrated in Asia, but entirely unknown to the New World. In the colonies it would be an anachronism and an absurdity; in India it is a feature

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated February 28th, 1901.

## THE GREAT DURBAR

of a hallowed system.”<sup>1</sup> He certainly had no wish to invest the function with any semblance of a constitutional importance, which, it was rightly held, it ought not to possess. And he made this clear in the course of an Address delivered to the members of the Legislative Council at its meeting in September. “ His Majesty the King . . . . is as much already our King and Emperor as he was the day after the death of the late Queen-Empress. No ceremony can increase his titles or add to the legality of his position. Why, then, it may be asked, should we have in India a celebration of his coronation at all?” And he gave the answer. “ To the East there is nothing strange, but something familiar and even sacred, in the practice that brings Sovereigns into communion with their people in a ceremony of public solemnity and rejoicing after they have succeeded to their high estate.”<sup>2</sup> But he had already won the day. “ If a Durbar held to celebrate the King’s accession to the paramount power in India—in fact step into the shoes of the Great Moghul—has only the limited significance you attach to it, I think clearly it would be desirable to have some such ceremony.”<sup>3</sup> The first obstacle had been successfully overcome, and on February the 14th, 1902, the intention of the Viceroy to convene a great and representative gathering at Delhi was formally made known by public proclamation.

Nevertheless, the fear entertained in official circles in England, that a great ceremonial function, organised and carried through under the imperious guidance of Lord Curzon, might acquire a dangerous significance, had not been altogether laid. And each fresh suggestion put forward by the Viceroy for enhancing the importance of the occasion was jealously scrutinised and questioned. No more effective means of bringing home to the masses of the Indian peoples the historical significance of the occasion could be devised than to associate with it an announcement of a remission of taxation. And Lord Curzon was determined that the general reduction of taxation which he had rejected as a provision of the Budget statement of the previous spring should figure as a royal indulgence among the boons to be associated with the Durbar. The proposal at once excited

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 8th, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Speech delivered on September 5th, 1902.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Secretary of State, May 29th, 1901.

## CURZON, 1902

doubts in the mind of the Secretary of State. He agreed that it would give great satisfaction in India if the Durbar held to celebrate the King's accession to the throne were associated in the minds of the people with a remission of taxation. "But if a remission is made, should it not be made when he is crowned here as King?" he asked. "Because it is his coronation as King of England which makes him Emperor of India."<sup>1</sup>

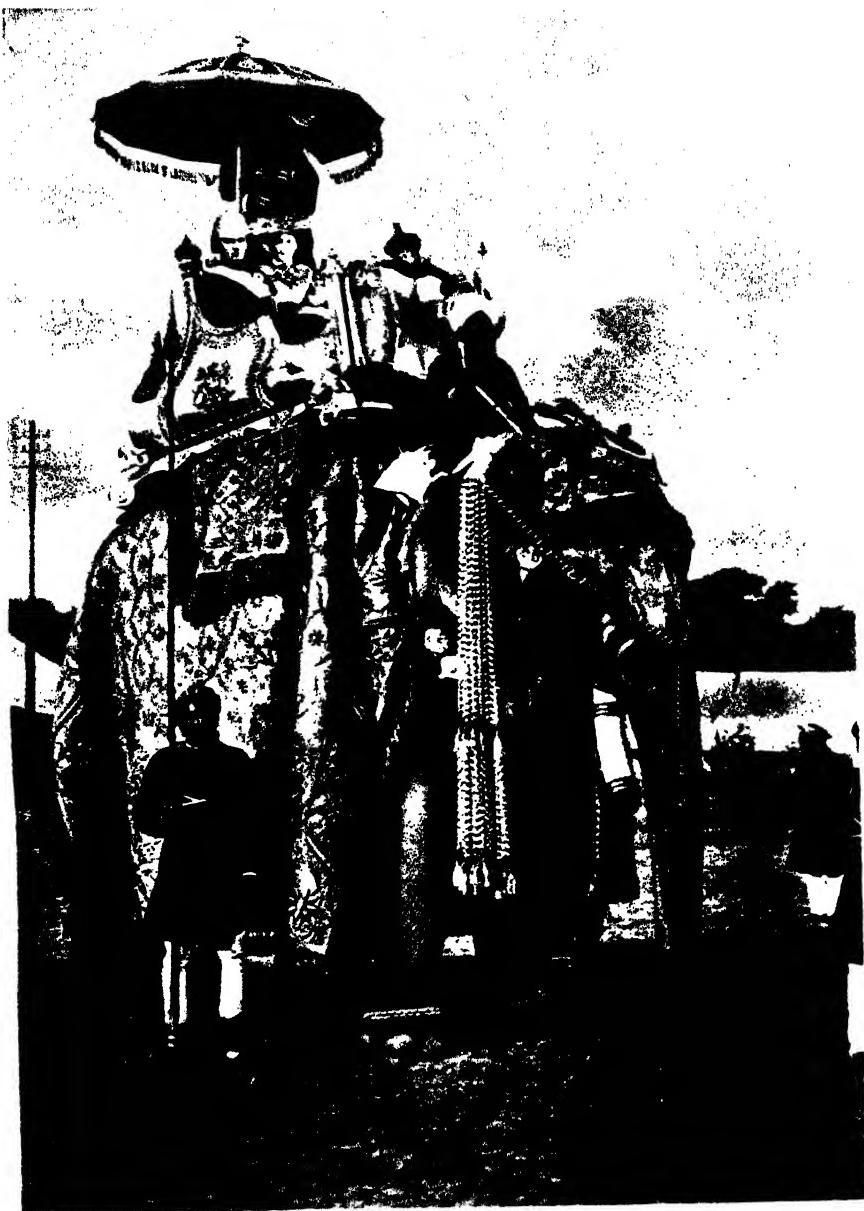
This difference, which to the onlooker may well appear to have been one of dates rather than of principle, became quite suddenly one of crucial importance, which ended, as will be explained later on, in bringing the Viceroy into sharp conflict with the Cabinet. It tore aside the veil of courteous and genuinely friendly consideration which had marked the constant interchange of opinion between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State and which, by its very nature, had all but blinded them to the real drift of tendencies beneath the surface. It was not the first time that a conflict of opinion had arisen. Differences had disclosed themselves from time to time on matters of internal administration, and still more on questions of foreign policy. But they had led to no open breach. The conflict which now made itself apparent, and which before the end of the year became acute, brought each for the first time face to face with the fact that a difference upon which accommodation was all but beyond the reach of either, was not only possible, but had actually arisen. And the episode was not an isolated one, for before the summer had run half its course the relations between the Viceroy and the India Council sitting in London, which had for some time past been far from cordial, became suddenly seriously strained. It was these things which gave to the summer and autumn of 1902 so profound and sinister a significance.

But at the beginning of his fourth Simla season Lord Curzon was quite unconscious of the impending breach. His interest was centred in the preparations for the great Durbar, to which he was devoting the whole of his attention.

Accounts of the actual Durbar itself and of the other imposing ceremonies which were duly held in connection with it during the opening fortnight of 1903 have been given by many writers—by

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Viceroy, January 9th, 1902.





THE VICEROY AND LADY CURZON RIDE IN STATE TO DELHI

## THE GREAT DURBAR

Mr. Stephen Wheeler, the official historian, in a sumptuous and authoritative volume; by Mr. Mortimer Mempes, with a background of richly coloured illustration; and by a host of eye-witnesses of the scene in every variation of phrase and paraphrase in a vast, if ephemeral, literature contributed to the columns of the English and the Indian Press. There is no lack of testimony, consequently, to the splendour of the setting or the regal bearing and commanding personality of the central figure. And there is little that can now be added with advantage to the descriptions written at the time. Much less is generally known, however, of the work of preparation, without which no such spectacle as was ultimately produced would have been possible.

Lord Curzon took the whole burden of planning the function on his own shoulders, and had begun to think out the broad lines of the ceremony long before a decision to hold such a gathering had been made known. "I am beginning to think about arrangements for the big Delhi Durbar on January 1st, 1903," he confided to Lady Curzon in a letter written on August the 14th, 1901, "and am thinking of building a big coliseum or Albert Hall to hold 10,000 people, where we shall have the Durbar one day and an Investiture another night. Then we shall have a magnificent review and illuminations of the city, etc." On his way to Peshawar, in April, he had spent two days at Delhi, inspecting sites and laying down plans; and on reaching Simla he set to work on an elaborate Minute in which he expounded his ideas. The programme, which he sketched out in seventy-seven paragraphs of print, was based on that of the "Imperial Assemblage," held by Lord Lytton in 1877, to proclaim Queen Victoria Empress of India. But, as Lord Curzon was careful to point out at the beginning of his Minute, the Durbar of 1903 would be "on a vastly larger scale than the Imperial Assemblage of 1877." He anticipated a huge influx of visitors. The great development of railways, the gradual crumbling of caste and other social barriers, and the growth of the Imperial spirit, would all tend to swell the numbers that would be likely to be present at the approaching ceremony. "In 1877 the number of persons attending in a more or less official capacity, and including the British and Native troops, the retainers of the Ruling Chiefs and the attendants and the camp

## CURZON, 1902

followers of all the official visitors, European and Native, was calculated at 68,000. I anticipate that in January next they will be nearer 150,000.”<sup>1</sup>

After dealing with a number of practical details, such as the organisation of the huge camps which would be required to accommodate the vast temporary population, “the grass-laying, planting-out and ornamentation of the grounds” within their precincts, temporary extensions of railways and the provision of tram lines and other means of communication, he proceeded to give an account of the different items of the programme “as I have sketched them out in my own mind and have already partially arranged for them on the spot.” The various official ceremonies would be spread over a fortnight and would begin with a State Entry, with its picturesque and imposing elephant procession, and would conclude with a great review of between 30,000 and 40,000 British and Indian troops. An important feature of the programme of official functions was to be the opening of an Indian Arts Exhibition. “Nothing will be shown that is not an art-ware, the central idea of the exhibition being the encouragement of the art industries in which the Indian workman once excelled, and not an illustration of the economic or industrial capacities of the country.” It was a feature in which Lord Curzon took a deep personal interest. He had chosen a site for the exhibition in the Kudsia gardens, a little way outside the Kashmir Gate of the city, so that it should lie on the route of everyone passing to and fro between the civil station and the city. And he had himself approved the designs of the building, which was to be in the Moghul or Indo-Saracenic style.

The design and structure of a great amphitheatre, which ultimately accommodated 16,000 people, and the procedure to be adopted at the Durbar itself were then explained. The decision that the amphitheatre should take the form of a gigantic horse shoe was in accordance with Lord Curzon’s own suggestion ; and the thought which he gave to every detail of its design and ultimate construction provides an admirable illustration of the extent to which the whole

<sup>1</sup>These and the quotations which follow are from Lord Curzon’s Minute, dated May 11th, 1902.

## THE GREAT DURBAR

scheme was the creation of his versatile brain. In a supplementary Minute, drafted some months later and intended to inform his colleagues of what was going on, since, as he informed the Secretary of State, "they leave the Durbar exclusively to me," he returned to the subject of its form. "The original design for the auditorium, drawn for me by Sir Swinton Jacob, provided for a combination of Oriental outlines with European features, such as striped bunting, streamers and flags. I have gradually succeeded in eliminating the whole of the latter, and the amphitheatre will be built and decorated exclusively in the Moghul or Indo-Saracenic style."

For some of the ceremonies the Viceroy proposed to utilise the beautiful Moghul buildings in the city. The Diwan-i-Am, or Public Hall of Audience, lent itself with special appropriateness to the Investiture which he contemplated holding and which, in view of the unprecedented numbers in which the Knights and Members of the two Indian Orders would be present, was likely to prove, from a spectacular point of view, the most brilliant of the ceremonies. The buildings in the Fort, including the Public and the Private Halls of Audience, would likewise be used as the setting of the State Ball. The latter had been used for the Ball given in honour of King Edward when, as Prince of Wales, he visited India in 1876. On that occasion decorations had been executed on its walls and ceiling which had ever since been "a source of reproach to the Government of India and of distress to any visitor who is not a Philistine." Such vandalism was an abomination to Lord Curzon, and he issued stringent orders that the buildings used were to be left in their natural and simple beauty. "On the present occasion, in the Diwan-i-Khas, as in the Diwan-i-Am, I shall not in the smallest degree restore, repair, touch, obliterate or deface any portion or feature of the original buildings." The railway authorities had offered to pierce a hole in the outer wall of the Fort and bring in a siding in order to facilitate the arrival of the guests. "I found that this would be a very expensive, if not a sacrilegious luxury, and I accordingly refused assent."

Public entertainments were arranged with as much forethought and attention to detail as the more formal ceremonies. Cricket and football matches, a polo tournament, native dances and dramatic

## CURZON, 1902

entertainments and a great Assault-at-Arms formed the staple of the programme.

Lord Curzon freely admitted his indebtedness, both to the imagination and the labours of Lord Lytton, the carefully kept record of whose experiences in 1877 had appreciably lightened his own task. But there were some items in Lord Lytton's programme which he demolished with the aid of a pen dipped in a pungent mixture of irony and humour. Lord Lytton had held an evening Levee attended by 2,500 persons. The scene had been one of "incredible crushing and disorder," which had lasted far into the night. It was an experiment which would ill bear repetition, and was dismissed in a sentence—"I propose to dispense with any such function." There were other of Lord Lytton's ideas which seemed to him to have been borne along on the wings of a too florid imagination, among them his proposal to create an Indian Peerage and Herald's College. The first tentative steps towards the realisation of this project had actually been taken at the Assemblage of 1877, when Lord Lytton had conferred upon the Chiefs silken banners embroidered with the armorial bearings of the recipients. The coats of arms upon them had been designed by Mr. Robert Taylor, "a Bengal civilian who possessed some Heraldic knowledge and who travelled round the country and invented for each Chief an escutcheon with supporters and a motto in the most approved Herald's College style." They had been presented to each Chief in turn, "being brought in (they were very top-heavy) by stalwart Highlanders and conferred by Lord Lytton with a suitable exhortation. Since then they have reposed in the Durbar rooms or Treasuries of the Chiefs, where I have sometimes come across them during my tours, dusty, faded and torn." The whole idea savoured to Lord Curzon of the incongruous and theatrical.

"I do not deny that the Indian Chiefs possess pedigrees as illustrious, and that they are as proud of their lineage as any English noble. But I do not think that these traditions require for their conservation the varnish of a purely European invention. I do not think that Maharajas or Rajas will be any the better or the happier for being converted into Dukes, Marquises,

## THE GREAT DURBAR

Earls and Barons. Nor do I think that they can attach any real or permanent value to coats-of-arms concocted by the liveliest use of a European imagination and representing ideas that are essentially foreign to Indian history and practice. I do not propose, therefore, to make any presentation of banners to the Chiefs ; nor will the revival of the idea of a Heralds' College or an Indian Peerage find any place in my programme."

Similarly, Lord Lytton's idea of an Indian Privy Council was examined only to be discarded. "It would probably not have emanated from a Viceroy who had been for a longer period in the country."

In other respects Lord Curzon gladly availed himself of the precedents of 1877. As in that year, so in 1903, he proposed that simultaneously with the Durbar at Delhi smaller functions should be held throughout the country. "In every town and almost in every village I should like the less fortunate and humbler of our fellow-subjects to participate in the festivities of the hour."

As the date of the historic celebration approached, the responsibility of ensuring its success fell with increasing weight upon the Viceroy's shoulders. On his way from Simla to Central India, in October, he halted at Delhi to view the progress made with the arrangements. "I find things here very backward," he told the Secretary of State, "and am jogging up the officials all round. There is too much talking and running round and not enough practical result. During the next two months there will have to be a complete transformation, or we shall not have everything ready in time. You would be amused at the questions I have to decide ; the design of a railway, the width of a road, the pattern of a carving, the colour of a plaster, the planting of a flower bed, the decoration of a pole—all this alongside big questions affecting the movement or accommodation of tens of thousands of people."<sup>1</sup> And he concluded a six weeks tour of Central India as he had begun it, with an anxious inspection of the work on the spot. "To-morrow I have a hard day going round everything at Delhi," he wrote on December the 3rd, "and then I leave at night for Calcutta."

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated October 26th, 1902.

He spent his time on the journey to the capital composing his Durbar speech ; and on arrival found his decision required upon a bewildering number of details in connection with the programme. It was represented to him, for example, that the hymns which had been chosen for the Parade service were not those that the troops would be likely to know well, and he was asked if he would not have "*Onward Christian Soldiers*" and "*O God our Help in Ages Past*" substituted for them. His reply was characteristic. "I agreed with Bishop to substitute 'O God, Our Help in Ages Past' for 'Praise the Lord'; but really, the Tommies, though omnipotent in India, cannot actually dictate our hymns. The Bishop agreed with me that '*Onward Christian Soldiers*' and '*The Church's One Foundation*' are quite impossible. Just look at their verses. Of course, all the soldiers think about is a good tune, without a thought of the words."<sup>1</sup> And when pressed as to his objection to the first of these two hymns he explained—"We cannot possibly have '*Onward Christian Soldiers*' at the Delhi service, because there is a verse in it that runs :

Thrones and crowns may perish,  
Kingdoms rise and wane ;

which would not be particularly appropriate."

There remained for consideration the question of the cost of the celebrations. Lord Curzon was vehemently attacked in certain quarters, and notably in a section of the press in England, as well as in the Native press in India, for squandering huge sums of money on superfluous display. Nothing exasperated him more than charges of this kind, for he was the last man in the world to impose unnecessary burdens upon the Indian Exchequer. He was constantly protesting against attempts by the Home Government to make India responsible for expenditure incurred in the interests of the Empire at large. He was particularly indignant at a decision which had been reached in England, that all charges in connection with the representation of India at the coronation of the King in London should be met out of Indian revenues. That the Imperial Government should require India to pay for the hospitality which they

<sup>1</sup> Recorded in an undated letter to Lady Curzon.

## THE GREAT DURBAR

were ostensibly offering to her representatives seemed to him to be outrageous. On this point he was adamant, and in the end he carried the day. News of the reversal of the decision reached him at Mysore, whither he had repaired in August to instal the young Maharaja on the throne. And he gave vent to his satisfaction in a letter to Lady Curzon. " You know the Despatch which I sent about paying for our Indian guests, and which I declined to withdraw, in spite of protests and appeals from Geo. H. and Arthur. I told the latter I would only withdraw it if they gave way along the whole line and paid for everything, including the India Office party. I said that I was fighting a principle and could not give way. . . . Yesterday came a telegram to say that the Government would bear the entire cost of the whole English expenses. It is a great triumph. No one will know here how it has been obtained ; but one day it will come out how by a single strong Despatch and by a little courage I defeated them all."<sup>1</sup>

Accusations of reckless extravagance where the revenues of India were concerned were, therefore, particularly irritating. When not based on culpable ignorance, they were as often as not sought to be sustained by deliberate exaggeration. But, quite apart from this, Lord Curzon could neither understand nor tolerate the perverse insouciance which refused to perceive beneath the outward show the existence of a great Imperial purpose. " The one thing most needed in India," he declared, " is the sense of common participation in a great political system and of fellow citizenship of the British Empire. The opportunities that exist of creating or fostering this feeling are few and rare ; and the political advantage that will result from the fact that on a given day the whole of the ruling classes of India, both European and Native, will be assembled together to commemorate with becoming pomp and dignity the accession of the Sovereign whom they equally recognise and that at the same hour all India will, to the best of its ability, be sharing in these rejoicings will, to my mind, justify an expenditure greatly in excess of any that we are likely to incur."<sup>2</sup>

He repeated the same arguments in a speech delivered at a meeting

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 9th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Minute dated May 11th, 1902.

## CURZON, 1903

of the Legislative Council on September the 5th, and he spared no pains in his efforts to disabuse the minds of persons who were genuinely disturbed by the constant stories of lavish expenditure which were current both in India and in Great Britain of the false impressions which had been created. If a Durbar is to be held it must be done worthily in honour of the King, he told Lord Percy, who had recently been appointed Under Secretary for India. "But I am almost ashamed of the relentless economy and commercialism which I have applied to the forthcoming ceremony."<sup>1</sup> Five months later he reminded the same correspondent of what he had then said. "I have been true to my word about the Durbar expenditure, and I expect you will be fairly amazed when you learn the small sum for which it was all done."<sup>2</sup>

The actual cost was made known by Lord Curzon himself in the course of the debate on the Financial Statement at the meeting of the Legislative Council, on March the 25th, 1903. He was then able to state that the large recoveries which he had all along anticipated had actually been exceeded, and that, apart from military expenditure, a large part of which would have been incurred on army manœuvres even if there had been no Durbar, the net charge against the revenues of the Government of India for the entire series of functions at Delhi was approximately £84,000. If to this sum were added the expenditure incurred by the various Local Governments, amounting to something approaching £100,000, the net charge upon Imperial and Provincial revenues amounted to a round sum of £180,000. "Is there anyone," he asked, "who will tell me that this is an excessive charge upon a population of over 230,000,000 in British India, exclusive of the Native States, for celebrating the coronation of their Sovereign?" And in a speech illuminated by the fire of faith and vibrant with the swelling notes of a glowing patriotism which always bore him to the summit of his eloquence, he begged them to pass from these material details to a consideration of a deeper meaning of the solemn rites in which they had participated. He had deprecated the financial criterion; he deprecated also the tendency to judge the Durbar as a mere display.

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated October 1st, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Lord Percy, dated March 5th, 1903.

## THE GREAT DURBAR

"I hope I am not a rhapsodist or a dreamer. But to me, and, I hope, to the majority of us, the Durbar meant not a panorama or a procession. It was a landmark in the history of the people and a chapter in the ritual of the State." It was intended primarily to bring home to the people of every fragment of the Indian continent the vital fact that under the Sovereign they were partners in a harmonious and majestic whole.

"Is it nothing that the Sovereign at his coronation should exchange pledges with his assembled lieges of protection and respect on the one side, of spontaneous allegiance on the other? Is it nothing that the citizens of the Empire should learn what that Empire means? . . . Is it nothing to lift an entire people for a little space out of the rut of their narrow and parochial lives, and to let them catch a glimpse of a higher ideal, an appreciation of the hidden laws that regulate the march of nations and the destinies of men? I believe that the Durbar, more than any event in modern history, showed to the Indian people the path which, under the guidance of Providence, they are treading, taught the Indian Empire its unity and impressed the world with its moral as well as material force. It will not be forgotten. The sound of the trumpets has already died away. The Captains and the Kings have departed. But the effect produced by this overwhelming display of unity and patriotism is still alive and will not perish. Everywhere it is known that upon the throne of the East is seated a power that has made of the sentiments, the aspirations, and the interests of 300 millions of Asiatics a living thing, and the units in that great aggregation have learned that in their incorporation lies their strength. . . . I think, too, that the Durbar taught the lesson, not only of power, but of duty. There was not an officer of Government there present, there was not a Ruling Prince nor a thoughtful spectator, who must not at one moment or other have felt that participation in so great a conception carried with it responsibility as well as pride, and that he owed something in return for whatever of dignity or security or opportunity the Empire had given to him."

## CURZON, 1902

It has been convenient, in dealing with the charges of extravagance with which Lord Curzon was assailed in connection with the Durbar, to anticipate somewhat. It is now necessary to return to the summer of 1902, in order to explain more fully the nature of the matters on which the Viceroy and the Cabinet were found to be "at issue.

## CHAPTER XVII

### GRAVE ISSUES

APRIL—OCTOBER 1902

THERE is much in the estrangement between Lord Curzon and the authorities at home which now revealed itself, and which becomes increasingly noticeable from this time onwards, that is only explicable in the light of what has been said about his temperament in an earlier chapter of this biography.<sup>1</sup> The emotional instability of a nature always highly strung had been greatly increased by the prolonged strain of his work in India, the effect of which showed itself both in physical illness and in mental *malaise*. There were times when he felt acutely the lack of congenial companionship, to which he had always hitherto turned, as a corrective of the distemper which solitude unduly prolonged tended to produce in him. "Here I am, working away the whole day long and a considerable part of the night," he complained in a moment of depression, "in the discharge of what I believe to be a serious and solemn duty. I am conducting the task in exile, in complete isolation from all friends and advisers, surrounded by forces and combinations against which it often required great courage to struggle, habitually harassed, constantly weary, and often in physical distress and pain."<sup>2</sup>

There had from the first been occasions on which he had been annoyed at the attitude of the Secretary of State's Council towards his policy, and more particularly towards the more important of his measures of reform. It sometimes seemed to him that his proposals

<sup>1</sup>See for example Vol. I, chapter XVII, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 28th, 1902.

met with a much more rigorous scrutiny at their hands than they had been wont to devote to those of previous Viceroys. But he discounted much of what he regarded as their obstructive attitude on the grounds of an uneasy feeling on their part that the programme of sweeping reform which he was carrying through might be regarded as constituting a somewhat severe indictment of their own past apathy or incapacity. And, secure in his belief that there was little in which he did not carry the Secretary of State with him, and that he could count, consequently, on his support in any serious difference with the Council, he had not hitherto troubled himself seriously over the matter. As recently as May the 14th he had made light of the necessity under which he sometimes found himself of splitting lances with the retired officials of whom the Council was in the main composed. "I do not want you to suppose that I trouble myself much about the matter," he wrote. "I get irritated and annoyed, but I always console myself by thinking that any vexation which is caused me by the veterans is more than made up by the undeviating consideration and support which I receive from yourself."

Fate has an unpleasant way of picking up a glove flung in a spirit of too great complacency into the arena. The ink was scarcely dry on the paper on which these words were written, when two telegrams were flashed over the wires from Whitehall, each questioning the Viceroy's action in connection with matters to which he attached supreme importance; namely, the appointment of a Police Commission and the issue of orders in connection with his programme of educational reform. They proved to be the sparks which fired a very considerable powder magazine. As he read them Lord Curzon realised with a sensation of shock that he had been living in something bearing a perilous resemblance to a Fool's Paradise—that the veterans whose pretensions to control the destinies of India he had light-heartedly dismissed actually had it in their power to imperil the splendid fabric of beneficent administration which he had been laboriously striving to build up. Under the shock of this discovery he placed on every little difference of the past a new and sinister interpretation. "When I said to you in my letter of May the 14th that I was not seriously annoyed at the

## GRAVE ISSUES

hostile and obstructive attitude of your Council, I spoke what I then felt or thought to be the truth. The very next morning came your telegram of enquiry and distrust about our educational proceedings." And on reflection he perceived that this was but one of many recent instances of hostility ; and he wished to make it clear, therefore, that he withdrew what he had said a little while before. "I recede from the position taken up in my letter of a fortnight ago. I have been thinking over the experience of the last 3½ years ; . . . it seems to me to establish, conclusively, a desire on the part of your advisers in the India Office to thwart and hamper me in the work which I am endeavouring to undertake here."<sup>1</sup>

Disillusionment is always bitter ; and under the shock of it Lord Curzon poured out his soul in a torrent of agonised despair. He pictured the members of the India Council pluming themselves upon having "gagged him here or held him up in a corner there"; spurning the sense of duty which was the mainspring of all his actions ; worrying him with "their innuendoes and suspicions while his heart was being eaten out with honest mortification." If he was to be perpetually nagged at and impeded and misunderstood he would sooner give up the task. "I will not continue any work in the world without the confidence of those whom I am serving, and unless I receive not only your support—for that I know has never wavered—but also the backing of your Council, I would prefer to resign my office."<sup>2</sup>

We may well believe that Lord George Hamilton read through this wholly unexpected outburst with feelings of bewilderment, culminating in dismay. He sought the aid of Lady Curzon—"George has had his way more than any Viceroy of modern times," he wrote, "and when you consider the magnitude of his reforms, the inevitable personal antagonisms that such changes arouse, it is marvellous that the instances in which he has been checked and overruled have been so few. . . . I have a deep and growing admiration for your husband's talents and force of character. But in public life you must give as well as take. The Council here are the final authority in all Indian matters. They are most distinguished, experienced men, and they cannot be expected to acquiesce in everything

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 28th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CURZON, 1902

suggested to them without comment."<sup>1</sup> In a letter to the Viceroy himself he attributed the latter's attitude towards the Council to misconception born of depression arising from physical ill health. "I do not think you could have drawn up the indictment you launch against the Council if you had not been so physically and mentally depressed as to be unable to take a fair, or I might even say a reasonable survey of your relations with the Council during the past two or three years."<sup>2</sup>

But Lord Curzon was not thus easily to be placated. He maintained that the picture that he had painted of the attitude of the Council towards him was no distortion seen through the miasma of ill health; it was a sober outline of the hard realities of the case. "I fully meant what I wrote, and I do not abate or withdraw it in any particular." Neither, he added, was the Secretary of State correct in supposing that what he rebelled against was the exercise by the Council of the powers of examination and, on occasion, of revision, conferred upon them by the Constitution—"for I am not such a fool as to take up arms against a Constitution, however faulty I may think it to be. I know well that such a conflict is one of *impar congressus Achillei*. No, as I have tried to explain over and over again . . . it is not against the exercise of superior authority that I have any complaint to make. It is against the assertion of an interference greater than has been exercised before and conducted in a spirit, not of confidence or helpfulness, but of distrust and suspicion."<sup>3</sup>

In his letters to Sir A. Godley he framed his indictment in even more caustic terms. He himself felt so acutely the loss of personal contact with affairs in England that he scarcely ever ventured an opinion upon home politics. "Your old veterans, however, many of whom have left India for a decade or more, are as dogmatic about the subjects that they have ceased to understand as a young curate in a pulpit is about those that he has not yet commenced to know."<sup>4</sup> And what was the result? Take the case of the delimitation of the Aden boundary then in progress, and be warned by the difficulties with which it had become surrounded.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, June 20th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated June 19th, 1902.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., July 9th, 1902.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., June 25th, 1902.

## GRAVE ISSUES

"The fact is that your Political Committee and the Foreign Office have gone entirely off the rails. They have thought that a Boundary Commission at Aden can be worked from Downing Street. It can't. The result is you have got things into the most frightful mess. You have wasted eight months of valuable time. You have reduced all your local officers to despair, Bombay to indignation, and the Government of India to righteous fury, and you will either have to give way or you will sacrifice the whole position. Now, why could not the India Office trust me to see you through in the matter? You send me out to India as an expert, and you treat my advice as though it were that of an impudent schoolboy. Had I tried my best or my worst, I could not have made the infernal muddle of the matter that has been made at home. . . . I write to you, my dear Godley, with extreme frankness, and I have perhaps said enough to show that my feelings during the last month have not been those of gratitude or exhilaration."<sup>1</sup>

He probably had.

This controversy over the attitude of the India Council was, unfortunately, only the prelude of much graver differences which now developed. It was, in fact, but the curtain-raiser to a much more serious drama.

While war was still raging in South Africa and the British Treasury was subject to heavy and continuous demands to meet the rapidly swelling bill, Lord Curzon had acquiesced in the suggestion made at home, that the cost of the Indian representatives at the Coronation of the King in London should be met out of Indian revenues. The situation seemed to him to have been entirely changed, however, by the Declaration of Peace signed at Vereniging on May the 31st. And he expressed the view with steadily increasing emphasis that for Great Britain to invite representatives from India, ostensibly as her guests to a great Imperial function, and then to demand payment from India for them, was an outrage on the elementary laws of hospitality. The Secretary of State was in sympathy with this view, and (unknown to Lord Curzon) was actually

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated June 18th, 1902.

in negotiation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer upon the subject, when all hope of an amicable settlement was terminated by the arrival of a Despatch from the Government of India couched in such terms as were bound, in Lord George Hamilton's opinion, "seriously to strain the relations between the Secretary of State in Council, whom it implicitly censures, and the Government of India." So provocative was its language considered to be, that he cabled asking for its withdrawal—a request which was repeated two days later by Mr. Balfour, who had succeeded Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister a few days before. The Prime Minister expressed doubt whether "so highly controversial a document" would facilitate the object which the Viceroy had in view, and urged that it read "too much like an indictment of one colleague by another."

To all such appeals the Viceroy turned a deaf ear—the Government must give way or the Despatch must stand. The Government gave way; but the episode left behind it an unpleasant taste. In a letter written on the day on which the decision was come to—August the 7th—Lord George Hamilton admitted that the incident had "grieved him greatly," and felt obliged to inform Lord Curzon that the Despatch under discussion had met with "an absolutely universal chorus of disapprobation from the Cabinet." But Lord Curzon remained unaccommodating and impenitent. "I have had a great victory over the India Office," he wrote to Lady Curzon; and to the Secretary of State—"I am not in the least disturbed at the universal chorus of disapprobation from the Cabinet. I was not there to state my case which, indeed, had no spokesman. . . . However, I am much less concerned with the disapprobation of the Cabinet than I am with their decision, by which I was immensely relieved, and the matter may now pass into the limbo of *res gestae*."<sup>1</sup>

It seemed, however, that Fate was in a malevolent mood; for scarcely had the combatants picked themselves up and shaken hands at the conclusion of this encounter, when another and more serious difference broke out. Lord Curzon, as explained in the preceding chapter, was absorbed in his preparations for the coming Durbar. He was determined that it should be of such a character as would stamp itself permanently on the minds of the people. A

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 27th, 1902.

## GRAVE ISSUES

gratifying improvement in the monsoon towards the end of August dispelled all fear of scarcity and satisfied him that a Budget surplus was now assured. It was this prospect that provided him with the means of rendering the Durbar especially memorable. With only a little more rain, he told Sir A. Godley, on August the 27th, all would be well—"and (tell it not in Gath) all indications point to our having a surplus next year that may enable us to announce a reduction of taxation at the Coronation Durbar that, without in the smallest degree imperilling our resources, will produce an electric effect throughout the country."

A few days later he mentioned his hope in a letter to the Secretary of State. The latter repeated the doubts which he had expressed when the matter had first been mooted eight months before. To associate a reduction of taxation directly with the accession of a new Sovereign, though doubtless in accord with Eastern ideas, would establish "a most awkward precedent." Might not the effect which the Viceroy wished to produce be equally well secured by a statement in general terms foreshadowing some remission of taxation at the end of the financial year, when the Budget was laid before the Legislative Council? The Viceroy was emphatic that it could not. "If anything is said at Delhi about reduction of taxation at all—and I say frankly that the political importance of doing so is, in my opinion, incapable of exaggeration—then it must be precise and clear." A vague statement that some reduction of taxation was to be expected three months later would be likely to throw the whole salt trade into a state of dislocation. But it was the political aspect of the question which, in Lord Curzon's eyes, out-weighed every other consideration.

"The Indians will simply fail to understand a Coronation Durbar altogether that is merely to consist of a pageant and a plausible speech, and to be associated with no concrete mark of royal favour. . . . I implore you most earnestly to let me be your adviser in respect of this Durbar and what is said and done therat. I undertake with the most absolute assurance to involve neither the Secretary of State nor the Government of India in any risk financial or political; and I should, indeed, be

## CURZON, 1902

sick at heart if I saw an opportunity which I believe will be fraught with great advantage both to the throne and the Empire so attenuated or frittered away as to lose the greater part, if not the whole, of these results.”<sup>1</sup>

And he proceeded to embody these views in a formal Despatch from his Government to the Secretary of State.

On receipt of the Despatch Lord George Hamilton telegraphed his regret that on constitutional grounds he was unable to sanction any direct association of the King’s name with a remission of taxation ; but that in deference to the Viceroy’s urgent representations he would submit the question to the Cabinet.

How deeply Lord Curzon felt upon the matter is clear, both from the action which he now took and from the tone of bitter disappointment in which he wrote to the Secretary of State. In a letter written on November the 13th he declared that it was with surprise, “amounting almost to consternation,” that he had received his telegram, and that he looked forward “with utter sickness of heart” to a further dispute with the India Council. But he was accountable for the success or failure of the Durbar, and he would sooner not hold it at all than do so under the conditions which it was desired to prescribe for him. “I say, therefore, with the utmost respect, but with emphasis, that I cannot accept the position which you desire to assign to me.” And having penned these ominous words he cabled to Sir Francis Knollys, invoking the assistance of the King.

The Viceroy’s action in appealing to the King was deeply resented by the Cabinet, and his personal friends there were under no illusions as to the gravity of the situation which he had thus precipitated. On November the 19th, St. John Brodrick telegraphed privately in advance of the official communication which was cabled by the Prime Minister on the 22nd, notifying him of the decision of the Cabinet and warning him of the feeling which had been aroused. He begged him not to push the matter to extremities, since to do so would be of no avail. And he wrote in amplification of his telegram —“Of course, we understood the gravity of the situation as shown by your language. And George Hamilton’s tribute to your work, power, influence and policy was warmly received. But no one

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Secretary of State, October 15th, 1902.

## GRAVE ISSUES

differed as to the result, and they were all determined that if you elected to go on such an issue we must face it.”<sup>1</sup>

For the second time within six months Lord Curzon spoke definitely of resignation ; for the second time wiser counsels happily prevailed, and at the eleventh hour means were found of bridging the gulf. The Viceroy proposed, and the Cabinet accepted, words for incorporation in his Durbar speech which, without in any way involving the name of the Sovereign, foreshadowed a decision by the Government of India in favour of early measures of financial relief. “Home Government have accepted my form of words for Durbar speech,” he informed Lady Curzon, who was resting in preparation for the coming celebrations, at Dehra Dun ; “so there is an end to the whole business, thank God.”

And not many days later this man of incalculable moods was writing to the Prime Minister on the subject in a tone which, far from suggesting the aggrieved and harassed statesman, was redolent rather of the spirits of the incorrigible boy.

“Excuse me for writing to you in pencil and in bed. My only chance is to seize the present moment. In half an hour I shall be getting up and donning uniform and orders and in less than three hours I shall be on an elephant, heading what I suppose the newspapers will describe as the most wonderful procession of the century. . . . It is always a good thing to see ourselves as others see us, and the picture you have painted of me as the imperious and self-willed colleague, who is never happy unless he gets his own way, has drawn from me more than a smile.”

Then followed some comments on the picture before he brought his letter to a close—“And now, dear Arthur, having acquitted myself of my mild apologia, let me in conclusion thank you for your warm and affectionate words and congratulate you upon the brilliant Parliamentary statesmanship—unequalled I believe during the past half century—which has enabled you to place your Educational Bill upon the Statute Book.”<sup>2</sup> And this was the man who only a short

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated November 21st, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. December 29th, 1902.

## CURZON, 1902

time before had written to the same correspondent in a strain of the profoundest gloom—" You have never served your country in foreign parts. For your sake I hope you never may. English Governments have always had the reputation of breaking the hearts of their pro-consuls from Warren Hastings to Bartle Frere. Do you wish to repeat the performance ?"

But for all the spirit of eternal youth which enabled him to rise from the profoundest depths of mental gloom, the incident left a permanent scar upon him. He was sorely wounded by St. John Brodrick's letter, and particularly by that part of it in which the writer sought to warn him that the Cabinet would not give way. " Observe the amicable way," he commented to Lady Curzon, " in which he informs me that all the Cabinet, including himself (a humble participator), were quite prepared to throw me overboard. . . . I need not comment on it all . . . but what a light it throws upon human nature and upon friendship." This was, perhaps, the most melancholy outcome of the whole affair. It had induced a crack in a closely cemented intimacy which had stood the test of nigh on twenty-five years.

It has been the experience of mankind that he who seeketh trouble never misseth it. It was certainly Lord Curzon's experience during the summer and autumn of 1902. And to the distress caused by his conflicts with the authorities in England was added further worry arising out of a fatal collision between two British soldiers and a native of the country.

The story of the Rangoon outrage, which has been told in Chapter VI, must have made it clear that there were few questions upon which Lord Curzon felt so strongly, or which called for so great a display of the courage which he possessed in such ample measure, as these recurring cases of conflict between British soldiers and the natives of the land. Quite early in his term of office he had been shocked at the steadily mounting number of affrays which he found recorded in the files of the Home Department, due in great measure to carelessness on the part of soldiers when out shooting, and to slackness on the part of the military authorities in compelling observance of the rules under which shooting passes were issued to them. And if he had been perturbed by the occurrences them-

## GRAVE ISSUES

selves, he had been horrified at the indifference with which he found them almost universally regarded. If in the course of a shooting expedition an Indian was unfortunately killed, the attitude of those concerned was only too often, he declared, that of a very fast bowler at cricket whom he had once met and who, having inadvertently killed a man with a ball which kicked up and struck him on the temple, exclaimed—"Why did the d——d fool get his head in the way?"

With the hope of reducing the number of such incidents he appointed a committee of soldiers and civilians in 1900 to consider and report on the rules under which shooting passes were issued ; and in a Minute which he himself drew up for submission to the committee he made a fine appeal to its members not to underestimate the gravity of the matters at issue. He had no desire, he said, to deprive the British soldier of a legitimate and greatly valued means of recreation which, in the majority of cases, he knew how to utilise and was careful not to misuse. But the carelessness of a small minority was affecting the entire relations between the governing and the subject races in the country. "The military authorities will not need to be reminded," he felt sure, "that the army is in reality the custodian of a more precious charge even than its own honour, since the conduct of a small number of soldiers may sensibly affect the position of all Englishmen and the attitude of all natives in the country ; that the natural position of the British soldier should be that of a source of protection and not of alarm to the people ; that the days have passed when accidents of the kind can be hushed up or ignored ; and that only by a determined enforcement of the rules and a stern punishment of those who are responsible for their infraction can the existing privileges as regards shooting be maintained."<sup>1</sup>

He knew well that his attitude was viewed with little enthusiasm, either by military society or by the British community in general. "None of the English newspapers is really with me in my crusade against shooting accidents," he told the Secretary of State. "The *Pioneer* is continually publishing anonymous letters from people who argue that they are invariably provoked by the insolence of

<sup>1</sup>Minute dated September 6th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1902

the natives. The *Englishman* did ditto earlier in the year.”<sup>1</sup> And he shrewdly suspected that even those who were tied to his chariot wheels, and who were the reluctant participators, consequently, in his crusade, regarded his actions as foolishly quixotic. This did not make the general indifference to the demands of justice any more tolerable. “I do not know what you think of these cases,” he wrote, when reporting to the Secretary of State a particularly bad example of acquittal where culpable negligence had resulted in the death of two persons. “They eat into my very soul.”

And if fatalities due to mere carelessness were bad, affrays resulting in injury or death for which not even the excuse of carelessness could be urged were infinitely worse. Such was the case which now came to Lord Curzon’s indignant notice. On arrival at Sialkot from South Africa in the spring of the year, two troopers of a famous cavalry regiment, the 9th Lancers, had beaten a native cook so severely that the man had to be taken to hospital and died nine days later. No adequate steps, it appeared, had been taken to discover or punish the culprits, and it was not until two months afterwards that whispers of the occurrence reached the Viceroy’s ears. Lord Curzon, who had never been able to erase from his mind the sense of horror and indignation which had been burned into it by the Rangoon outrage, gave orders for an immediate investigation. The result satisfied him that there had been a deliberate attempt to hush the matter up, and he decided, with the concurrence of his Government, that the Commander-in-Chief must be asked to take such disciplinary action as would mark the sense of grave displeasure with which Government viewed the conduct of all concerned.

The leave of all officers of the regiment then in India—not of those in England as was falsely reported at the time—was stopped until June 30th, 1903, and other regimental punishments were inflicted. He was under no illusion as to the view which would be taken in military circles of his interference in the case. “These things,” he told Sir A. Godley, “give me sleepless nights and days of misery.” And writing to Ian Malcolm some little time afterwards he said—“.... as you know, anyone who dares to touch a crack regiment of the British army—even though it contains two

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated September 25th, 1900.

## GRAVE ISSUES

murderers—is looked upon as though he laid hands on the Ark of the Covenant.”<sup>1</sup>

And the outcome fell not one whit short of his expectations. The details of the collective punishment inflicted upon the regiment—repeated with exaggerations which no denial ever altogether succeeded in overtaking—were attributed, quite wrongly, of course, to the Viceroy himself. His action became the subject of a considerable agitation in Parliament and the press ; and the regiment, which at Lord Curzon’s own request, proffered against the advice of the Military Member, was permitted to take part in the Durbar celebrations, received an ovation from the European spectators, not excluding the company of Lord Curzon’s own guests, the meaning of which it was impossible to misunderstand. The effect of such a demonstration on a sensitive nature may easily be imagined ; and, despite the denial contained in it, is pathetically apparent in his own account of the incident.

“ One interesting event happened. The 9th Lancers rode by amid a storm of cheering ; I say nothing of the bad taste of the demonstration. On such an occasion and before such a crowd (for of course every European in India is on the side of the army in the matter) nothing better could be expected. But as I sat alone and unmoved on my horse, conscious of the implication of the cheers, I could not help being struck by the irony of the situation. . . . I do not suppose that anybody in that vast crowd was less disturbed by the demonstration than myself. On the contrary, I felt a certain gloomy pride in having dared to do the right. But I also felt that if it could truthfully be claimed for me that I have (in these cases) loved righteousness and hated iniquity—no one could add that in return I have been anointed with the oil of gladness above my fellows.”<sup>2</sup>

His motives were either travestied or misunderstood. He was sneered at for being on “ the poor black man tack.” “ Some of the home papers,” he told Lady Curzon, “ say, of course, my sole object in 9th Lancer case was to curry popularity with the native

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated January 20th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 8th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1902

press! Good Lord! Why then did I not publish the whole thing in August, instead of waiting to have it dragged out till November."<sup>1</sup> He resented the charge that he was personally responsible for the nature of the punishment meted out. "Nobody seems to know at home," he complained in his letter to Ian Malcolm above referred to, "that the 9th Lancers punishment was his (Sir Power Palmer's). He proposed it and in a matter of military discipline of course we all agreed." This was no doubt correct. But it is permissible to surmise that the Commander-in-Chief's proposals were framed in accordance with what he knew Lord Curzon would expect.

It was often said that, on the general question of these unfortunate collisions, Lord Curzon made no allowance for provocation on the part of the native, and refused to consider the effect which uncompromising denunciation of the British soldier was likely to have on a section of the Indian population. "For the next year or two," declares Sir Evan Macdonochie, who was serving in India at the time, "the British soldier was constantly exposed to provocative insult from the scum of the bazaars."<sup>2</sup> This criticism did Lord Curzon less than justice. He was fully aware of this aspect of the case, as he showed in his Minute submitted to the shooting pass Rules Committee. ". . . . the native is undoubtedly more independent and self-assertive than he used to be. . . . His respect for the white man and the British uniform is not what it was . . . . and there are parts of the country where he is liable to press what are meant to be equal rights into a claim for special licence. Cases are sometimes reported in which the initiative in insolence or attack has proceeded from natives. Trumped up charges against British soldiers and white men are not unknown. No diagnosis would be fair which did not take note of this change in the situation."<sup>3</sup> But no possibility of his attitude adding temporarily to this danger was permitted to divert him from the task to which he had set his hand, namely, that of purging British rule of the taint of partiality and injustice which was "pulling the fabric of our dominion down about our ears." His whole attitude upon the question was dictated

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated December 14th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>"Life in the Indian Civil Service," by Sir Evan Macdonochie, K.C.I.E., C.S.J.

<sup>3</sup>Minute dated September 6th, 1900.

## GRAVE ISSUES

by the faith which he pinned to a great ideal. "One thing I will and do make a stand for here," he once told one of the oldest and most affectionate of his friends, "and that is righteousness in administration. It is not that I have turned Pharisee or that my spirits have gone sour. But the English people, and still more the English rulers, are here for an example."<sup>1</sup>

And it is but fair to add that among those who attached importance to that aspect of the question of which they thought Lord Curzon was little conscious were men who now readily admit the salutary change which Lord Curzon brought about. The British soldier may for a time have been exposed to provocative insult from the scum of the bazaars. But from the time that Lord Curzon made his stand on the ground of morality and justice the trouble gradually died down; and we have it on the authority of Sir Evan Macdonochie that "in these times such a case is rarely ever heard of." And his considered opinion is that Lord Curzon was often too lightly charged with being pro-Indian or anti-British, "the plain fact being that, apart from his passion for equal justice between man and man, he realised as the crowd failed to do, the infinite injury caused by the least instance of apparent partiality to the moral strength of our position in India."<sup>2</sup> Not even Lord Curzon himself could have asked for a more generous tribute nor a more ample vindication.

There is one other episode of the first importance that has to be recorded before the page is finally turned down on the fateful days of 1902. On October the 16th the Viceroy and Lady Curzon entertained Sir Power and Lady Palmer at a farewell dinner on the eve of their departure from Simla. On the following day Lord Kitchener, released at last from the toils of the South African war, left England for India to take up his duties as Commander-in-Chief. Even before the death of Sir William Lockhart in the spring of 1900 Lord Curzon had told the Secretary of State that he wanted a Kitchener to carry through the reforms that were needed in the military organisation of the country. After the death of the former he had pressed still more strongly for Lord Kitchener's appointment. He complained bitterly of having to be his own Commander-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Hon. A. Lyttelton, August 29th, 1900.  
<sup>2</sup>"Life in the Indian Civil Service."

## CURZON, 1902

in-Chief, and declared that he was ready to drop the strict control which he was exercising over the military machine the moment he was given a soldier whom he could rely on to relieve him of the duty. "I ought not to be a sort of civilian Commander-in-Chief. . . . I have saved the Government of India lakhs of rupees and scores of absurd and doctrinaire experiments. But it breaks me in the midst of all my work to have to pronounce upon plans of forts, making of roads, location of troops, discipline of regiments, construction of defences, and all the thousand and one details of military administration."<sup>1</sup>

In deference to these representations the Cabinet had decided, in July 1900, to appoint Lord Kitchener, and for at least forty-eight hours, as a reference to chapter VI will show, the Secretary of State was under the impression that the appointment had been made, and he so informed the Viceroy. The urgency of the tasks awaiting Lord Kitchener elsewhere, however, caused the Cabinet to revoke their decision almost as soon as it had been taken, and the question fell once more into abeyance.

Military opinion in India was far less favourable to the appointment of Lord Kitchener to the Supreme Command than was Lord Curzon. Soldiers with long Indian experience feared the possible result of his complete lack of knowledge of Indian conditions combined with his self-willed and dictatorial nature. And when towards the end of the year 1900 rumour became busy with his name, Lord Curzon's military advisers begged him, if he could not prevent the appointment, at least to urge that before he was given the higher post he should be tried in a Provincial Command. It was, indeed, at this time that a phrase which became famous at a much later date was coined by Sir Power Palmer. When reporting these views to the Secretary of State Lord Curzon added—"He (Sir Power Palmer) calls him 'Kitchener of Chaos' and predicts general disaster."

Lord Curzon himself, however, remained faithful to his original opinion that Kitchener was the man whom he needed for the post, and he continued to press for his appointment. "I am imploring the Secretary of State not to delay Kitchener for ever," he told

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 27th, 1900.

## GRAVE ISSUES

Sir S. MacDonnell on February the 28th, 1901. "If I get him out within a year we can put the machine right during our time. It is perilously run down. I cannot do it without a strong C.-in-C. ; still less can I do it alone." And now at last Kitchener had come, and Lord Curzon looked forward with intense interest to his first meeting with him. "Kitchener joined me two days ago at Bhurtpore and spent a day and a half with me," he reported to Lord George Hamilton on December the 3rd. "We had long, confidential and most friendly talks, and he greatly impressed me by his honesty, directness, frank common sense and combination of energy with power. I feel that at last I shall have a Commander-in-Chief worthy of the name and position." And three months later, after further experience of him, he wrote his opinion to Sir S. MacDonnell. "Kitchener is mad keen about everything here. I never met so concentrated a man. He uses an argument. You answer him. He repeats it. You give a second reply, even more cogent than the first. He repeats it again. You demolish him. He repeats it without alteration a third time. But he is as agreeable as he is obstinate, and everyone here likes him."

When, three years before, Lord Kitchener had been suggested, not for the post of Commander-in-Chief, but for that of Military Member, Lord Curzon had objected on the score of these very characteristics. It was strange that it did not occur to him that in the circumstances of the case a man of Lord Kitchener's temperament was as likely to produce unforeseen results in the one appointment as in the other.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### POMP AND PAGEANTRY

JANUARY 1903

THE great Durbar of 1903 was over, and the thought uppermost in the minds of most of those who had witnessed it was the utter inadequacy of words to convey any real idea either of its splendour as a spectacle or of the depths of the emotional waters which it stirred. Writing to Lady Curzon while the memory of all that he had seen was still fresh, Mr. Perceval Landon said—"There is a certain foolishness—and I think we all felt it—in trying to describe the scenes of the Durbar at point blank range."<sup>1</sup> Others wrote in a similar strain—"I think the miraculous success of the Durbar plunged us all in a stupor of surprise, which was, perhaps, the most eloquent tribute of admiration the composition of our party enabled us to give."<sup>2</sup>

Lord Curzon's own feelings on the eve of the event were curiously different from what was generally supposed. "I am writing this at Dehra Dun, just before starting for Delhi," he told the Secretary of State. "I dare say that the majority of people at home would imagine my sentiments to be those of proud and elated anticipation . . . . How strangely people misread each other, and how different is often the reality. I start for Delhi to-night without the slightest ray of pleasurable anticipation, and with a feeling almost of indifference. I am anxious that the functions to which I have devoted such ceaseless labour and which down to the smallest detail are my own creation, should pass off successfully, and that the series of

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated January 13th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter (undated) from Lord Elcho afterwards Lord Wemyss.

## POMP AND PAGEANTRY

ceremonies should be worthy of the Sovereign in whose honour they are being held. But beyond that I think that both my mind and heart are an absolute blank. This is due first and foremost to the great disappointment imposed upon me by you and the Cabinet...<sup>1</sup> But he was not proof against the elation which success conjured up, and on January the 13th he was writing in a very different strain.

"Opinion about the Durbar is crystallising. Among both Europeans and Indians you will find but one opinion upon the series of events from the ceremonial and spectacular point of view. All agree that they were a brilliant and unqualified success, unmarred by a single hitch. Your letter of December the 24th contains a friendly warning to me—not now given for the first time—to devolve some portion of my work upon others. Now, do you imagine that if I had acted upon this advice in respect of the Delhi functions the same results would have ensued?.... I had a number of most admirable and hard-working officers under me, and they faithfully and devotedly carried out orders. But that the whole thing would ever have gone through, had I not deliberately violated every axiom that has ever been pressed upon me, is not to be believed. In my view, the popular philosophy is entirely wrong. It is supposed to be a mark of efficiency and even greatness to get your work done for you by other people. I frankly disagree."

The impression created on the mind of the spectators was profound. Its changing scenes played upon the whole gamut of human emotions. For days the eye was dazzled and the senses sated with the brilliance and colour of a seemingly unending pageant. And when the brain reeled under the stimulus of the stream of impressions that flooded in upon it from without there were episodes which stirred to their depths the feelings of the heart within. When a company of Mutiny Veterans marched into the Durbar arena the whole great assembly rose as one man, and with what voice it could control, cheered till it could cheer no more.<sup>2</sup> Who can adequately depict the memories which such an episode recalled?

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated December 28th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>"Life in the Indian Civil Service," by Sir E. Maconochie.

## CURZON, 1903

What, for example, were the thoughts and feelings of the silent old Sikh soldier who, nearly half a century before, had stood by Nicholson when the latter fell mortally wounded under the walls of Delhi? Once again after the lapse of years he heard the historic plains which stretched away from the city gates resounding with the neighing of horses and the tramp of armed men. Did the comparison between the two dramas—that of 1857 and that of 1903—suggest thoughts on the strange mutability of human fortunes? We cannot say, for none but he knew, and he, after the manner of his kind, when deeply moved, preserved his peace.<sup>1</sup>

From the point of view of this biography the outstanding feature of this historic ceremony is the extent to which it was recognised on all sides as an expression of the Viceroy's personality. It was this thought which struck both those who viewed it from afar and those who witnessed it at close quarters. "Your gift of taking yourself seriously at a function is equally un-British and invaluable—it is splendid."<sup>2</sup> Fresh from participation in the ceremony, Lord Elcho wrote that it was no surprise "to see you doing without any apparent effort things which no one else would have attempted to do at all. The absolute absence of any fuss—so conspicuous at the smallest functions at home—and the fact that all the organisation and machinery of the stupendous result we witnessed were absolutely invisible, struck me more than anything else—which is saying a great deal when each day and each hour almost shocked one into surprise."

The whole character of the series of ceremonies and the success with which they were crowned were the outcome of qualities which Lord Curzon possessed in high degree. The almost unprecedented smoothness with which so vast and varied a programme was carried through provided the most conspicuous, perhaps, of many illustrations in a crowded life, of the efficacy of what he had himself once dubbed half in earnest and half in jest, his "middle class method." In the same way the spectacle owed its dramatic quality to his artistic temperament, to his sense of the Imperial grandeur

<sup>1</sup>The soldier was Nicholson's orderly, Nihal Singh; the story of his presence at the Durbar is told by Sir E. Maconochie.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Lord Selborne, dated January 4th, 1903.

## POMP AND PAGEANTRY

of the British Empire, both as an abstract idea and as a concrete reality, and not least, perhaps, to the delight which he always took in breathing the breath of life into the printed pages of history and displaying the episodes recorded in them to the world, clothed with actual flesh and blood.

There were few more strongly marked characteristics in his artistic make-up than this passion for resurrecting the past. His imagination was always strongly stirred by the many dramatic scenes depicted in the pages of the Old Testament, and one can well imagine that he must frequently have had in mind the strange drama enacted before the eyes of the prophet Ezekiel in "the valley which was full of bones," when as he passed by them round about, there was a noise and a shaking "and the bones came together bone to bone . . . and the breath came into them and they lived and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army." It was this ever present desire to bring history home to the imagination and "make it a living reality instead of a printed page," that was in the main responsible for the shape taken by the Victoria Memorial.<sup>1</sup> And now on his return from Delhi to Calcutta he found further opportunity of gratifying this deeply-rooted taste.

The great house built by Lord Wellesley, which after his manner Lord Curzon invested with an almost living personality of its own, was approaching its centenary ; and he had conceived the idea of marking the occasion by projecting onto the screen of the present, so to speak, a living picture of the scenes of a hundred years ago. On January the 26th, 1803, Lord Wellesley had celebrated the Peace of Amiens by a great Ball, for which the stately rooms and galleries of his recently completed palace provided an admirable setting. Lord Curzon had determined that on January the 26th, 1903, the same rooms should witness once again the revels and echo with the merriment and laughter of those more picturesque and spacious days. The occasion was prepared for with characteristic thoroughness and care. Mr., afterwards Sir George, Forrest was applied to for records and information, for Lord Curzon was already thinking of compiling, as an appendix to the function, an authoritative history of the building. "In connection with the centenary of the

<sup>1</sup>See back Chapter X, page 157.

## CURZON, 1903

opening of Government House, which I shall celebrate by a big Fancy Dress Ball of the Wellesley period, on January the 26th, 1903, I think of bringing out a history of Government House during the past 100 years.”<sup>1</sup> The history was duly undertaken, and in due course published—after a lapse of more than twenty years.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary accounts leave no room for doubt as to the success of the entertainment. Lord Curzon himself, impersonating Lord Wellesley, “the Sultanised Englishman,” to whom he bore a good deal more than superficial likeness, had caused his costume to be designed with such faithful accuracy to the original as to suggest to those present that it was, indeed, his prototype who had actually stepped down from out the frame of his picture—to be seen hanging in the Council Chamber—and come in proper person to open the revels. Accuracy in reproduction was not confined to the costume of the Viceroy. The uniforms of his staff—presented to them by Lord Curzon—were copies down to the smallest detail of those worn by Lord Wellesley’s entourage on the corresponding occasion in 1803.

Hutton has said of Wellesley that he “loved display, not for itself, but as the outward sign of the dignity with which he was invested. His dressings and his attitudes, his ceremonies, attendances and processions, his pageantry and extravagances, were part of his conception of the character of a British ruler in the East. . . . Here was the contrast of his nature to the Englishmen among whom he moved, who mocked, like Sheridan, at his airs and graces.” What was true of Wellesley was equally true of Curzon. Both his love of dignified display and his passion for reconstructing history must have been gratified by the great assemblage—it was estimated that between 1,000 and 1,500 guests were present—of January the 26th, 1903. “Put back a hundred years,” wrote one who was present, “we became our great grandparents again, imitating in spirit, language and dress the high-waisted ladies and stately men who danced in these very halls a century ago and now sleep so quietly in old Park Street cemetery, or, maybe, back in their own English village churchyards.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 31st, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. I of “British Government in India,” published in 1925.

<sup>3</sup>In the *Statesman* of January 27th, 1903.

## POMP AND PAGEANTRY

Lord Curzon had, indeed, a quite unusual power of detaching himself from the present—all the more remarkable in view of his absorption in everything that he took in hand—and of viewing the events of history all as parts of a single pattern woven upon the loom of time. So vividly did he picture old Fort William, that he declared that he never passed the buildings now standing upon its site without them fading from his vision to be replaced by the walls and bastions of the former fort with its eastern gateway, the unfinished ravelin in front of it, and in front of that again the ditch into which the bodies of those who perished in the suffocating darkness of the Black Hole on the historic night of June the 20th, 1756, were cast.

And to him the task of renewing the pattern where, for one reason or another, it had become faded and indistinct, was a sacred duty. He could not tolerate the thought of human beings having toiled and spent themselves in vain. “Though human life is blown out as easily as the flame of a candle, yet it is something to keep alive the memory of what it has wrought and been.”<sup>1</sup> So he devoted much time and careful thought to tracing out by means of tablets and other similar devices upon the very buildings of the city itself the story of past episodes in the foundation of British rule. The curious visitor to Dalhousie Square to-day may observe here and there—and notably on the steps of the Post Office building—brass lines let in to the stone, and numerous tablets of white marble with inscriptions incised upon them, inserted in the walls of the neighbouring buildings. The latter tell their own story; the former mark the positions of the outer and inner lines of the curtain and bastions of old Fort William, in so far as they have not been built over. The loving care with which he set to work to erect once more to the memory of those who perished in the tragedy of 1756 a monument in place of the Holwell obelisk, which had disappeared, has been referred to in an earlier chapter.

His pride in Calcutta as an abiding witness to the character and achievements of the British people impelled him not merely to recall incidents of which she had been a spectator in the past, but to adorn and beautify her for the benefit of posterity. “The interest and

<sup>1</sup>Speech at the unveiling of the Holwell Monument, December 19th, 1902.

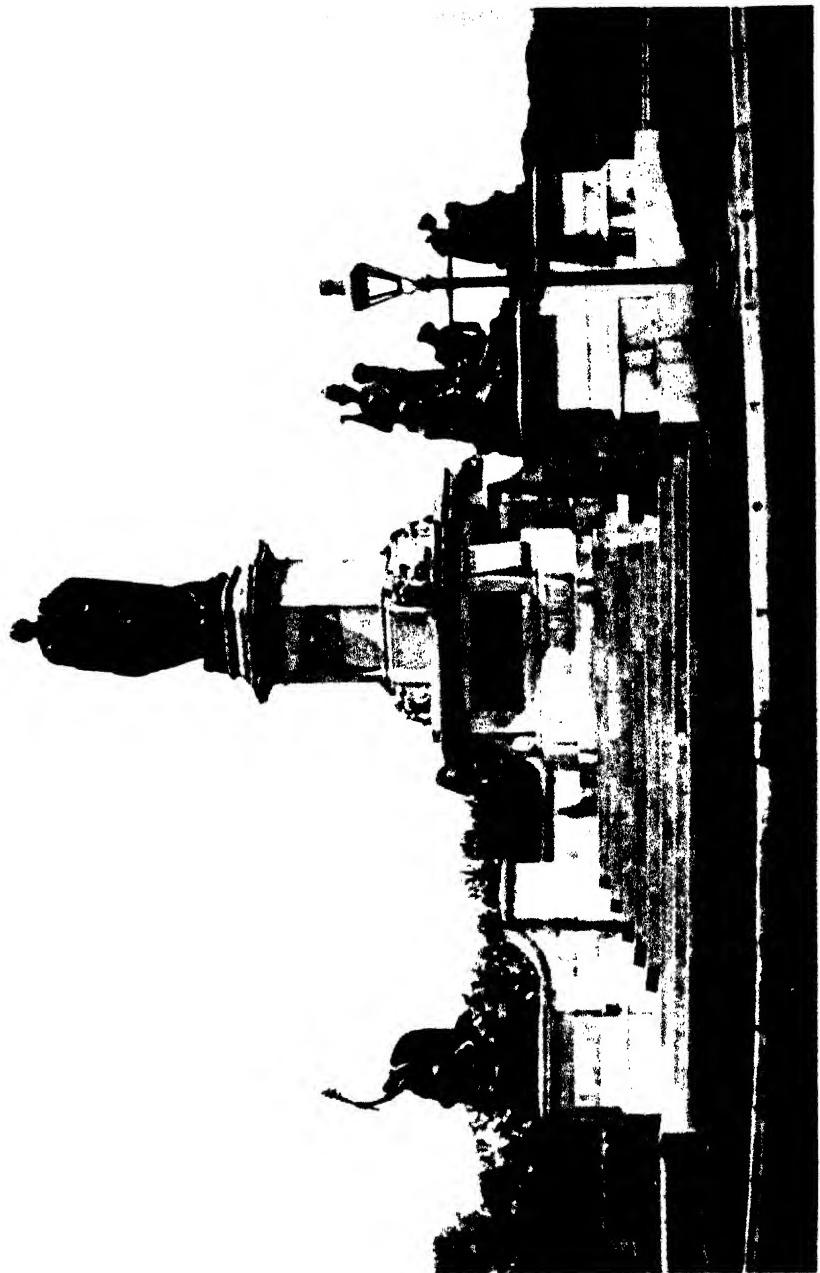
## CURZON, 1903

fascination of this great city," he told the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, on February the 12th, 1903, "have grown upon me with each advancing year. To me Calcutta is the capital, not merely of a Province, great as that Province is, but of the Indian Empire." And as such she seemed to him fitly to symbolise the great creative work which the English had done and still were doing in the Eastern world. No stranger who came to visit her but must feel that here was "the settlement of an Imperial race and the fitting habitation of a worldwide rule." In all respects, therefore, she must be rendered worthy of so great a destiny.

He took pride in the vast industrial enterprises of which the city was the scene ; but jute mills and cotton mills and rice mills had their drawbacks—they were for ever "drawing their sooty fingers across the sky." Unless this habit was eradicated he predicted for the capital a dolorous doom. "I am reluctant to see Calcutta, which has risen like a flame, perish in soot and smoke"—smoke which besmirched the mid-day sky with its vulgar tar-brush and turned their sunsets into a murky gloom. "May I once again remind you," he wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State, on January the 22nd, 1903, "of the question of the smoke nuisance of Calcutta, concerning which I urgently pleaded that you would accede to our proposal and send us out a man as far back as in my letter of June the 18th last?" In due course a smoke expert arrived, and steps were taken to purge Calcutta of its disfiguring grime.

In the city itself great improvements were effected. Roads, foot-paths, lighting and conservancy in the heart of the business quarter were taken in hand and lifted out of the rut of neglect into which they had fallen ; the northern end of the famous Maidan was laid out with flower beds, and is known to this day as Curzon Gardens ; Dalhousie Square was renovated and replanted ; the Metcalfe Hall—built in memory of Sir C. Metcalfe and used partly as a second rate Public Library and partly as the meeting place of a Horticultural Society—was purchased and converted into a great library on the lines of that of the British Museum. "I want a man of the best education," he wrote in connection with this latter project, "with experience of cataloguing, arranging, binding, preserving (most necessary in India) ; and with that large literary interest which will





STATUE OF LORD CURZON IN CALCUTTA  
R. H. TROOKE, WITH R. A.

## POMP AND PAGEANTRY

always be on the lookout for fresh spoil, and will make of the Library both a historical munitment-chamber and also a temple of learning."<sup>1</sup> It was an embellishment to the city of which he was particularly proud. "The Imperial Library will be one of the monuments of my time," he wrote.<sup>2</sup>

In the suburbs, the old country house of Warren Hastings was bought and restored and the surrounding grounds tastefully laid out. "On Saturday I went to Hastings House," he told Lady Curzon, on December the 15th, 1902. "You never saw such a change—house, grounds, furniture, everything quite lovely. It is now one of the gems of Calcutta . . . . the grounds are a combined park and garden of exquisite beauty. All my Calcutta improvements are gradually bearing fruit."

There was also the tremendous problem of the native quarter of the city to be dealt with—"the congested areas that skulk behind a fringe of palaces, the huge and palpitating slums." At Lord Curzon's request a scheme involving an expenditure of £5,000,000 received the sanction of the Secretary of State; and out of this beginning grew, later on, the Calcutta Improvement Trust, which was formally inaugurated in 1912, and which has since then wrought a revolution in the lay-out and construction of the city. Under its auspices great arterial roads are being driven through the congested portions of the city, parks and squares are being opened out, insanitary dwellings are being swept away, and housing accommodation to meet the requirements of the dispossessed population is being provided.

In light of his impassioned attachment to Calcutta, his bitter and sustained resentment at the removal of the seat of Government some years later from that city to Delhi, becomes intelligible. He had so closely identified himself with the city, its history, its pulsing life, its very buildings themselves, that he saw in its dethronement something amounting almost to a personal insult to himself. It was characteristic of the man that in matters in which his feelings had been engaged as deeply as they had been in the fortunes of Calcutta, he found it impossible to forget and difficult to forgive. In this case time did little to reconcile him to the change. In the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, June 20th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

CURZON, 1903

sumptuous volumes which he devoted to the story of the Viceroys and of the famous buildings of Calcutta associated with their rule he reiterated, in a passage written but a short time before his death, his oft-expressed condemnation of the move. "The concluding reflection may perhaps be permitted," he wrote ere he brought his story of the Governors General to a close, "that while the abandonment of Bengal at the seat of Government and the move to Delhi were defended at the time as an act of Imperial statesmanship, there is now hardly a living authority on India, English or Indian, who does not disapprove and deplore it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"British Government in India," Vol. II, p. 250.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

JANUARY—APRIL 1903

WITH the Durbar and its associated ceremonies out of the way, Lord Curzon turned his attention to those anxious problems which loomed ever larger and more menacing on the horizon beyond the Indian frontiers. The increasing share of his time and thought which he was now being called upon to give to foreign affairs was reflected in his public utterances. At the conclusion of the Address with which he brought the proceedings of the Legislative Council to a close on March the 25th, 1903, he called the attention of the Indian public to the growing weight of responsibility which was being thrown upon their ruler's shoulders by the inexorable march of events which was drawing India, "once so isolated and remote," into the vortex of world affairs. "For the first time," he told Lady Curzon, in a letter describing the proceedings, written the same evening, "a Viceroy spoke serious words about foreign affairs and lifted the veil a little. The people should know what great responsibility there is in the background."

Round the Indian borders, he reminded those whom he was addressing, was a fringe of Asiatic States whose integrity and whose freedom from hostile influence were vital to the welfare of India, but over whose future the clouds were beginning to gather. He had no desire, he declared, to appear in the rôle of an alarmist, and he did not wish to suggest that there was any question that was at the moment in an acute or menacing phase. "But do not let anyone on the strength of that go to sleep in the happy illusion that anxiety

will never come. The geographical position of India will more and more push her into the forefront of international politics. She will more and more become the strategical frontier of the British Empire." Such circumstances imposed upon her rulers the duty of incessant watchfulness and precaution ; required of them that their forces should be in a high state of efficiency and their schemes of policy carefully worked out and defined.

These words of warning were doubtless suggested by the experience of the past few months. They were prophetic of much that was still to come. Let us deal first with the experience of the immediate past.

To a letter written to the Viceroy by the Prime Minister towards the close of the year 1902 had been appended two postscripts, one conventional, the other significant—

" P.S.1. Kindest regards to the Vice-Queen.

" P.S.2. I am a good deal disquieted about Afghanistan."

Nor was this the only intimation which Lord Curzon received at this time that the unsatisfactory nature of our relations with the Amir was attracting an increasing measure of attention at home. Writing of the pre-occupations of the Cabinet on December the 12th, St. John Brodrick referred pointedly to the matter—" We are absolutely immersed in your Afghan possibilities."

The hope, which had been freely entertained, that Lord Curzon's personal influence with Abdur Rahman and his successor, Habibulla, would result in improved relations between the Government of India and the ruler of Afghanistan had, in fact, been disappointed. And Lord Curzon himself, annoyed at his lack of success in bringing about any alteration in the intractable attitude of the Amir, had for some time past been urging the adoption of a more determined attitude by the British Government.

The reason of his failure to disarm the suspicions of the Amir is in reality not far to seek. When, as Mr. George Curzon, M.P., he had visited Kabul in 1894, the astute occupant of the Afghan throne had undoubtedly regarded him in the light of a useful card to be played in the game in which he was engaged against the Indian Government, whose constant efforts to come into closer contact with Afghanistan it was his object to defeat. He had spoken very freely

## DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

to him of his grievances against the latter, and had made it clear that he looked to him to take up the cudgels on his behalf from his seat in the House of Commons. It must, therefore, have been with feelings almost of dismay that he learned of the appointment of his erstwhile confidant to the head of the august and troublesome body against whose too pressing attentions he had sought to enlist his services.

He was, of course, far too well versed in the rules of the diplomatic game to exhibit any trace of the chagrin which he may have felt, and his letters of welcome on Lord Curzon's arrival in India left nothing to be desired—"Your Excellency is a sincere well-wisher of both the Governments of India and Afghanistan. Please God, by Your Excellency's friendly manners and discreet proceedings, the foundations of friendship and union between the two Governments will acquire great firmness, and day after day the plant of mutual friendship and union of the two Governments will flourish and blossom." But in Asia, more even than elsewhere, perhaps, action is a truer guide to the workings of the mind than hyperbole; and one of Lord Curzon's earliest experiences in his official relations with the Amir proved a better key to the latter's attitude than the flowery rhetoric of his complimentary letters.

Among the complaints which the Amir had made in 1894 and which he had particularly required his guest to make a note of with a view to his reporting it to the authorities in England, was a charge against the character of the men appointed by the Government of India to act as their agents in Afghanistan. They always selected Shiashs—and Shiashs, as he did not hesitate to inform his guest, were "the worst of reptiles." But apart from this they were men of inferior character and status who were little more than spies. In 1894 Mr. Curzon had wisely agreed that men of high character and discretion ought undoubtedly to be chosen to represent the Government of India at Kabul. Yet in 1899 he experienced unexpected difficulty in meeting, to the satisfaction of the Amir, this seemingly reasonable request. "The Amir has written rather a rude letter," he complained, when writing to Lord George Hamilton, on December the 14th of that year, "rejecting the new envoy whom I proposed to send to Kabul on the grounds of his materialistic

and atheistic opinions ! This is a bogus and quite untrue charge ; the real objection being, I fancy, that my nominee, who has been in our service at Peshawar and in the Khyber, knows too much of the frontier and of Afghan ways." Another selection was eventually made, and the matter amicably settled ; but not before Lord Curzon had threatened the Amir that unless the representative of the Indian Government received more considerate treatment than had hitherto been the case he would be compelled to curtail the privileges accorded to His Highness's agent in India. The episode was a straw which showed which way the wind was blowing.

The first important communication of an official nature received from the Amir conveyed to the Viceroy news of the approach of the Russian railway to the Afghan frontier and asked the latter for advice. This gave Lord Curzon the opening which he desired for discussing the mutual obligations of the two countries, and he expressed the view that in the absence of telegraphs and railways it would be difficult for his Government to move troops to the assistance of His Highness with the requisite despatch. Here was a suggestion which was calculated to bring about the very thing which for years past Abdur Rahman had been striving to avoid, namely, closer contact between India and Afghanistan ; and his reply left no possible doubt as to his attitude towards his British ally. No British troops would ever be required, he declared, to enable him to repel aggression upon Afghanistan. All that he required of Great Britain was an adequate supply of money and munitions for the equipment of his own forces. The only concession which Lord Curzon succeeded in securing after further correspondence was a reluctant admission that if after prolonged resistance the troops of Afghanistan proved unequal to the task of repelling an invader, then the people of Afghanistan might be expected to consent to receive the assistance of British troops.

This was an interpretation of the Treaty relations between the two countries which Lord Curzon was not prepared to let pass unchallenged. It acquired an added significance, in view of the immense importation of arms and ammunition into Afghanistan during recent times—an importation which had already attracted Lord Curzon's unfavourable notice and which he considered had

## DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

now reached dangerous dimensions. It accorded ill with the famous declaration which Abdur Rahman had made to Mr. Curzon himself five years before—"England and Afghanistan are one house. One house should have one wall. Are your soldiers going to join mine in the defence of that wall?" Moreover, it was not now Great Britain, it seemed, who was to decide upon the manner in which she would discharge her Treaty obligations, but the Amir, who was to dictate to her what measures she should take. What was the explanation of this puzzling and unwelcome change?

Lord Curzon's answer to the above question had all the appearance of plausibility. "My own view of his present policy is that, enlightened by the Tirah Campaign, and conscious of the enormous strength given to him by the possession of hundreds of thousands of arms of precision, he has late in life revived the idea of consolidating Afghanistan into an independent military Power, capable of speaking on equal terms with the enemy in both gates."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon was of the opinion that the question of the unrestricted flow of arms into Afghanistan should at once be taken up with the Amir. But the South African war was exercising the minds of the authorities in England, and the Cabinet were unwilling to embark upon any controversy with the ruler of Afghanistan. Lord Curzon was obliged to remain satisfied, therefore, with the statement of dissent from the Amir's view of his Treaty obligations and a tentative reference to the quantity of munitions being imported into the country, which he had made in an earlier communication. He was not, however, convinced. The extent of the importation of warlike stores seemed to him to constitute a greater danger than the Home Government were willing to admit; and when, later on, he received further unsatisfactory communications from the Amir, he made it quite plain that he did not see eye to eye with the Cabinet on the question.

"I now regret still more than I did at the time that you did not allow me to send my proposed reply to the absurd propositions contained in his inordinately long lucubration of last year; because, as I think I remarked at the time, if you do not

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, November 22nd, 1899.

answer an Oriental's casuistry, he thinks he has reduced you to silence, and because in his recent batch of letters to which I am referring he repeatedly taunts us with not replying to his previous communications. I think in these cases you may really trust me to know how to handle the Amir as well as anyone else at home." <sup>1</sup>

Matters were no further forward when, on October the 7th, 1901, news was received of the death of Abdur Rahman and of the succession of Habibulla. Lord Curzon's experience of Habibulla in 1894 had impressed him very favourably. He had spoken of him at the time in terms of the highest praise as "a very charming personality," who talked "with great ease and fluency and with a wisdom and sense far beyond his years." He believed him to be "a sincere and devoted friend of the British alliance." He looked forward at last, consequently, to the *rapprochement* between the two countries which he believed it to be within his power to bring about. He had gone so far, in fact, on one occasion as to confess that he had been influenced in his desire to become Viceroy by this very belief. "It was one of the reasons that made me anxious to come out to India; for I felt that possibly my acquaintance with Afghanistan and my friendship with Habibulla might be of some service on an emergency."<sup>2</sup> Habibulla's reply to his invitation to him to meet him at Peshawar in the spring of 1902, to which reference has been made in an earlier chapter, came, therefore, as a grievous disappointment. And when events showed, not only that the new Amir held that the Agreement made by the Government of India with Abdur Rahman was binding on them as regarded himself, but that he adhered rigidly to the interpretation which his predecessor had placed upon it, his disillusionment was complete. ". . . looking over the whole surface of the political world with which I have to deal," he wrote on September the 3rd, 1902, "the spot where the clouds seem to me to cluster most menacingly is in the direction of Afghanistan."<sup>3</sup>

Early in June Lord Curzon had repeated his invitation and had strongly pressed the Amir to meet him at Peshawar in October.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 2nd, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., October 9th, 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

To this request Habibulla had vouchsafed no answer. And behind the obdurate silence of the Amir loomed the ever present menace of Russian intrigue, rendered more ominous by rumours which now gained currency on the frontier, that the Amir himself was coquetting with the idea of a Russian alliance. In these circumstances the Viceroy warned the Home Government that in the absence of any gesture from the Amir by the time the Delhi Durbar was over, he would propose to write to him in language which would compel a reply, calling his attention to the recent evidence of disloyal or unfriendly conduct on his part and requiring a definite assurance on the nature of which the future relations between the two countries must depend. It was this warning that gave rise to the postscript to the Prime Minister's letter and to a feeling of acute uneasiness throughout the Cabinet. The fact of the matter was that a stage in our relations with a foreign country had now been reached at which, for the reasons given in a previous chapter, a fundamental difference between the Viceroy and the Cabinet was inevitable.

The Cabinet were, indeed, seriously alarmed. In a letter to the Secretary of State, written on November the 27th, the Viceroy had stated very plainly what he would recommend in the event of the Amir definitely throwing in his lot with Russia. His proposals would include the occupation of Kandahar and the pushing forward of the frontier to Girishk and the Helmund river. He made it clear that he was not now recommending these things.

“ All that I have meant to say to-day is that if the Amir breaks faith and deserts us, there is an alternative policy to inaction, and that it is a policy which, though not without risk, seems to promise more benefit than injury to British interests. What I maintain that you cannot possibly do is to sit still and let the entire policy and outlay of the past 20 years, nay the last 60, be wiped out before your eyes. If this breakdown occurs, it will be due to open perfidy on the part either of the Amir, or of Russia, or of both. If you do not like to tackle Russia, then at least punish the Amir. If you allow a man and a State of his calibre to flout the British Empire, then we had better put up our shutters and close business.”

## CURZON, 1903

It was fortunate that the Viceroy was considering a hypothetical and not an actual case, for the Cabinet were in no mood to listen to any such suggestions ; and Lord George Hamilton considered it necessary to apprise him of the position both by telegram and by letter. " So decided and unanimous was the objection to any forward movement that, after the Cabinet was over, I thought it right, and with the full concurrence of the Prime Minister, to telegraph to you what had passed." <sup>1</sup> And in amplification of his telegram he explained in his letter of December the 19th that " the growing dislike, if not abhorrence, of any forward move, or of any action likely to entail military operations," was so strong that he believed that if the matter was put to the vote " there would be a disposition to abandon all our present obligations, and to substitute nothing in their place except an attempt to come to an understanding with Russia."

Had the Amir definitely broken with the Government of India, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that a rupture between the Viceroy and the Cabinet must have followed ; for it is clear, from a voluminous correspondence of which brief extracts only have been given above, that neither could have accommodated his views to those of the other. The danger of a breach over Afghanistan was averted by the receipt on December the 12th, 1902, after many months of suspense, of a communication from Habibulla which, if not wholly satisfactory, at least contained no hint of any intention to sever his connection with Great Britain or to seek new alliances elsewhere. And since the protestations of friendship contained in his letter received confirmation from his action in accepting, about the same time, British arbitration in a boundary and water rights dispute between the Persian and Afghan officials on the borders of Sistan, the way was opened for a resumption of negotiations with the object of placing the relations between the two countries on a more satisfactory and durable basis.

On this question the Cabinet were ready to consider the Viceroy's recommendations. " When the Durbar is off your mind," Lord Selborne wrote, on January the 4th, 1903, " you will be writing us at length about Afghanistan. The Middle Eastern question is the

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated December 19th, 1902.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

question of the future, Persia and Afghanistan." But he was left under no illusions as to the point of view from which the question would have to be approached.

"On Afghanistan we await your views before tackling the question ; but as you must have gathered from what you have already heard, we are all opposed in judgment to the policy which Roberts keeps advocating. It will not have escaped you that financial considerations will have to play a continuously larger part in the consideration of these questions."

Developments on the Continent, for example, made increased expenditure on the fleet imperative.

"We cannot afford a three-Power Standard, but we must have a real margin over the two-Power standard, and this policy the Cabinet have definitely adopted. . . The navy then must continue to increase, and it is not possible that the army should continue to increase *pari passu*. Indeed, I am sure that a day will come when a Cabinet will decide that the army estimates must decrease in order that the navy may increase. All this has a very real bearing on the Middle Eastern question. . . . It is easy with compulsory military service to be a great military Power for home defence or European warfare. It is easy to be a great naval Power of a natural and continuous growth such as ours. It is a terrific task to remain the greatest naval Power when naval Powers are year by year increasing in numbers and in naval strength, and at the same time to be a military Power strong enough to meet the greatest military Power in Asia."

Lord Curzon did not dissent from much that Lord Selborne said. But he denied emphatically that the facts set forth presented a complete statement of the case.

"I do not dispute your diagnosis of the factors that will go to determine our Asiatic policy in the future. But it is not one (a question?) of exact calculation, nor of mere £ s. d., nor of ships and men. Diplomacy is also capable of playing its part ;

## CURZON, 1903

and there are two constituents of successful diplomacy which seem to me sometimes to be in danger of being forgotten ; one is knowing your own mind, the other is letting other people know it.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon certainly knew his own mind, and equally certainly he let other people know it. But in the matter of Afghanistan he was not the only person who held definite and clear cut views. And if he continued to press the Amir to meet him, and to urge upon the Cabinet the necessity of a fresh Agreement as a condition precedent to the payment of the subsidy granted to the late Amir and to the continued acceptance by Great Britain of an obligation to defend the country, the Amir doggedly maintained the position which he had originally taken up, and the Cabinet continued to deprecate any action which might result in bringing matters to a head.

It is easy to see that if no one of the three parties to the controversy was prepared to recede from the position which each had taken up the negotiations were doomed to sterility. And events proved this to be the case. The Amir was determined not to meet the Viceroy—and never did so. The Viceroy was convinced that a frank personal discussion with the Amir was essential if the Government of Great Britain were to undertake to defend a country of whose military organisation, armament and resources—so long as the existing state of affairs was permitted to last—they could know nothing ; of which their officers were not even allowed to cross the border, but which was nevertheless the theatre in which they might at any time be called upon to wage an international war with the full strength of India and Great Britain. And he was prepared to bring such pressure to bear upon the Amir as might prove necessary to enable him to get what he wanted. The Cabinet, rather than take the risk involved in insisting on compliance with Lord Curzon’s wishes, were prepared to pay the subsidy and to acquiesce in the contention obstinately clung to by Habibulla.

In the end a settlement—the terms of which were practically dictated by the Amir and were hotly condemned by Lord Curzon—was effected by the despatch of a British Mission under Mr., after-

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated January 29th, 1903.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH AFGHANISTAN

wards Sir, Louis Dane, to Kabul. But this was not until 1905, after Lord Curzon's return to India from a period of leave in England ; and long before this he found himself once more at issue with the Cabinet on a question of foreign policy in another corner of Asia. Before detailing the events of 1905, therefore, it is necessary to return to the opening days of 1903.

## CHAPTER XX

### DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

JANUARY 1903—APRIL 1904

THE critical phase through which the relations between the Government of India and the Amir of Afghanistan had passed during the closing months of 1902 was scarcely over when Lord Curzon found cause for renewed anxiety at developments in Tibet—so much so that he considered it necessary to call his Council together to discuss the situation during the crowded and exacting days of the Delhi Durbar.

The tour carried out along the frontier between Sikkim and Tibet by the Political Officer in Sikkim during the previous summer had cleared the air to the extent of making it plain that inasmuch as the Convention of 1890 had not been signed by any Tibetan official, it was regarded by the Tibetans as possessing no validity. The whole question had by now, however, acquired a much more sinister significance than the Viceroy would have been disposed to attach to a mere local dispute concerning boundary pillars or grazing rights; for evidence of Russian activity in this quarter, which had been accumulating for some time past, had become so strong as to convince him that the Russian Government had acquired definite rights of intervention in Tibet which sooner or later they would undoubtedly exploit to the detriment of British interests. From being a matter of mere local interest the question had become, consequently, one of high Imperial importance. And, in accordance with his usual practice, Lord Curzon had given the Secretary of State early warning of the measures which his Government would be likely to submit to him for dealing with it.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

"I am myself a firm believer in the existence of a secret understanding, if not a secret Treaty, between Russia, China and Tibet," he wrote on November the 13th, 1902 ; "and, as I have said before, I regard it as a duty to frustrate this little game while there is yet time. Our recent action on the Sikhim border greatly flustered the authorities both at Lhasa and Peking ; and for a time there was great talk of envoys and negotiations. Suddenly, under orders from Peking, all this was suspended, and for weeks we have heard nothing. My impression is that the Russians have told the Chinese on no account to negotiate with us or to allow us to come to close quarters with the Tibetans ; for the result of any such proceedings must be greater intercourse between India and Tibet, if not an improved Treaty. My idea, therefore, is that we should let the Chinese and Tibetans play the game of procrastination for some little time longer, and should then say—as it is clear that they do not mean business—that we propose to send a Mission up to Lhasa to negotiate a new Treaty in the spring. This would, in fact, be a reversion to the policy of Lansdowne at the time of the Macartney Mission, from which the Government of India of that day, in deference to the protests of China, were, as I think, wrongly induced to depart. But on the present occasion I would not on any ground withdraw the Mission. I would inform China and Tibet that it was going ; and go it should. . . . These ideas are only thrown out in the rough. I will mature them as time proceeds."

In the meantime the crisis over Afghanistan had apprised the Viceroy of the attitude of the Cabinet towards anything in the nature of a forward policy, and he was far from hopeful of the welcome which his proposals would be likely to receive. Writing from Delhi on January the 8th, he informed Lord George Hamilton of the discussion which had taken place and of the fears which he entertained as to the attitude of the Home Government towards the question. "If the Cabinet are as seriously impregnated as your recent letters lead me to believe, both with ignorance and timidity about Asiatic foreign affairs, then it is quite possible that the alarms which our

Afghan proposals (as so far developed) will probably do much to allay will be resuscitated by what we suggest in the case of Tibet." And he warned him that a heavy responsibility would rest upon any Home Government that affected blindness—"even when the finger has already begun to trace its fatal handwriting upon the Tibetan wall."

The essence of the proposals which were duly submitted by the Government of India to the Secretary of State was that a suggestion for the solution of the frontier difficulty which had been put forward by the Chinese Government in December, namely, the holding of a Conference, should be accepted, but subject to three conditions: in the first place that the Conference should be held at Lhasa; in the second place that it should include a representative of the Tibetan Government; and, finally, that any new Treaty which the Conference might produce should be signed by the Tibetans as well as by the Chinese. It was further urged that the negotiations should embrace, not merely the comparatively small question of the Sikkim frontier, but the far larger question of our future relations, political and commercial, with Tibet; and that the Tibetan Government should be required to agree to the appointment of a permanent British representative in Lhasa.

The case presented by the Government of India was a particularly strong one. The repeated violation of existing Treaties by the Tibetans afforded strong moral justification for the action proposed. Moreover, Tibet was the one corner of Asia in which we were at an overwhelming political and strategical advantage as compared with Russia. For, while we were coterminous over a long distance with Tibetan territory and were entitled, therefore, to insist on the observance of neighbourly relations by her people and Government, there was no single point at which Russian territory impinged on the borders of Tibet. And, finally, in the event of the Russian Government seeking to acquire a position of undue influence at the Tibetan capital, they were prohibited, both by the extent and nature of the country which separated Lhasa from their nearest military bases, from meeting with an equivalent display of force any demonstration which we might find it necessary to make for the purpose of safeguarding our legitimate interests in the country.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

The question of Tibet provided, therefore, a crucial test as between the Viceroy and the Cabinet. If the latter were not prepared to accept the Viceroy's view as to the necessity of asserting ourselves in this quarter of the Indian glacis, it must be clear that they would not do so anywhere else.

On February the 19th the Cabinet deliberated on the question and came to a decision which was all but unanimous, that a Mission to Lhasa could not be sanctioned. The significance of this decision was not lost upon the Secretary of State; and when conveying it to the Viceroy he made no attempt to disguise the full implication attaching to it. He explained that he had impressed upon the Cabinet the fact that in no other part of Asia were we ever likely to find the material advantages more in our favour than they now were in Tibet. And he added—

"If then, the Cabinet deliberately, under such circumstances, are unwilling to run the risk of international complications, disturbances to trade, and all the other hindrances and embarrassments which arise from strained relations with a foreign Power, they are never likely to incur that risk unless some gross insult is offered to our honour or our flag. And it seems to me, therefore, that the decision which was arrived at must be taken, not only as regulating a particular transaction, but to a large extent as governing our future policy in Central Asia." :

Here, then, was the naked truth stripped bare of all evasions or pretences. The Cabinet were in definite and unalterable disagreement with the fundamental conception on which the whole foreign policy of the Viceroy rested. Lord Curzon was convinced that it was essential in the interests, not merely of India itself, but of the British Empire as a whole, that our authority should be unmistakably and, indeed, ostentatiously, asserted, not only up to the limits of our own borders, but at every point on the glacis which sloped away from the long perimeter of the Indian frontiers, at which hostile influences might otherwise obtain a lodgement. The Cabinet's sole desire was to avoid complications on or beyond

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated February 20th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

the frontier. And if, as was foreshadowed by Lord Curzon in his Budget speech, foreign policy was to play an increasingly important part in the immediate future, it must have been apparent to those primarily concerned that, unless the Viceroy was prepared to subordinate his own deeply-rooted convictions to the plainly expressed wishes of the Cabinet, the Government of the Indian Dependency must become increasingly difficult, even if a complete rupture was averted.

It is, perhaps, surprising in these circumstances that Lord Curzon should not only have determined to remain at his post, but should even have been contemplating an extension of his term of office. He was certainly under no illusions as to the nature of the task which lay before him, and there were times when he toyed with the idea of giving up. "As I read these successive expositions given by you of the attitude and temper of public men at home, the heart goes out of me as regards the future of our dominion in Asia, and I sometimes say to myself, 'Is it worth while struggling on when our own people and their leaders are themselves engaged in tracing the handwriting on the wall?'"<sup>1</sup> Lady Curzon, too, was beginning to entertain doubts about the future. "I puzzle all day long about Arthur," she wrote from Simla, where she awaited Lord Curzon's return from a short spring tour in Rewa and Gwalior, "and hope you will bring an answer from him in time to greet your Council with *adieu* or *Je reste*. Six months ago we felt differently about staying on." She knew that his decision would be dictated by the highest considerations of duty; but, being human, she could not refrain from putting in one small plea ". . . don't let us stay until the *joie de vivre* has died in us. We have still years of life to live somewhere, and we mustn't have embittered hearts to speed us on the way."<sup>2</sup>

It was in accordance with Lord Curzon's temperament, that while it was with the utmost difficulty that he subordinated his views to those of other people, he yet shrank from lifting his hand from the plough to which it had once been set. Moreover, his confidence in the soundness of his own views encouraged him in the belief

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, March 12th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated March 2nd, 1903.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

that sooner or later the Cabinet must come round to his way of thinking. He admitted in a letter to the Prime Minister at this time that he thought it was the duty of Ambassadors and Proconsuls to be a little ahead of the Governments whom they advised. "The inclination of the latter is always to go slow—sometimes unnecessarily slow. The way has to be shown to them... For instance, I remember Lord Cromer advocating the Assouan dam, a railway up the Nile, and the recovery of the Sudan, years before any of them was assented to by the Home Government... In the same way some of the things that I have put forward, and that you have rejected—e.g. Tibet—will of a surety come; and my only discredit will have been to be a little previous."<sup>1</sup>

It had been the same during the years 1895-98, when he had served as Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Lord Salisbury's Administration. At that time, for example, he had not been obliged to wait long for the acceptance by the Cabinet of his views about Wei-hai-wei.<sup>2</sup> But being then in a subordinate position, his determination to continue to associate himself with a policy with which he was in little sympathy had, in any case, no adverse results beyond the creation of a certain measure of embarrassment to himself. The position now was an entirely different one. He was no longer in a position of subordination; as Viceroy of India he occupied an unique position, the importance of which was enhanced by the admitted authority with which prolonged previous study and four years actual experience of the Viceroyalty endowed his utterances on Eastern questions. And looking back over the years, it is easy to perceive, even if it was not plainly apparent at the time, that if he remained in India in face of the fundamental difference of outlook between himself and the Cabinet which had now disclosed itself, his relations with the Home Government must be those of constant strain. Even if breaking point was not actually reached, the differences between them must surely result either in an unwilling Cabinet being dragged protesting at the heels of an imperious Proconsul far beyond the limits to which they desired to go, or in a fiercely restive Viceroy being hampered and

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated July 8th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>See Vol. I, chapter XIX.

## CURZON, 1903

restricted in carrying through the policy on which his heart was set.

Let Lord Curzon at least be given the credit which is his due for the high and unbending sense of duty which at such times always played a determining part in keeping him at his post. "How one could moralise on how little one gets from high places," wrote Lady Curzon at the close of the letter above quoted. "But it is the higher aims of duty and right that keep your heart high, Beloved." Lord Curzon himself deeply resented any hint that he was asking a favour when suggesting that an extension might be given him, to enable him to put the finishing touches to some at least of the reforms which he had inaugurated. "I have been rather pained at the tone of Balfour's letter to me about a possible extension of my term," he told Lord George Hamilton. "The implication underlies it that I have asked for a favour. . . . I wish you clearly to understand that, except from the point of view of public duty, I have not the slightest desire to exceed my five years term, and His Majesty's Government may retire me whenever they please."<sup>1</sup> And writing to Ian Malcolm a little later, he said much the same thing. "I hope to get home to England in May, after an absence of 5½ years, and unless I am then cashiered by some new political combination indifferent to my merits, I believe I am to return in the autumn of 1904 to finish off all my Indian ventures. It is a prospect, not of exhilaration, but of duty; for people will have become tired of being kept up to the mark long before then, and I shall probably have broken down."<sup>2</sup>

The actual story of the Tibetan expedition which in the end was reluctantly sanctioned by the Cabinet has frequently been told, and need not be recalled in any detail here. The main reason given by His Majesty's Government for refusing to sanction a Mission to Lhasa in 1903 was that they were in communication with the Russian Government as to their intentions in that part of the world. Lord Lansdowne, who had succeeded Lord Salisbury as Foreign Minister, employed very stiff language in his representations to the Russian Ambassador on the subject; and on April the 11th the latter was authorised categorically to deny that the Tsar's

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 30th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated June 18th, 1903.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH TIBET

Government had made any Agreement with Tibet, or that there was any intention of sending either a Mission or an Agent to Lhasa.

In view of these assurances and of the refusal of the Cabinet to agree to a Mission to Lhasa, Lord Curzon now proposed that a Conference should be held at Khamba Jong, the nearest inhabited place on the Tibetan side of the frontier. While the Government agreed to this it was clear that a wide divergence still existed on the question of policy. Lord Curzon proposed that the whole question of our relations with Tibet should come under review at the Conference, that we should demand the removal of the trade mart from Yatung on the frontier to Gyantze half way to Lhasa, and the appointment of a British representative, preferably at Lhasa, but, in any case, at Gyantze, with the right of direct access to the Tibetan Government at the capital. He further urged that if the Conference showed any disinclination to accept these demands, which he regarded as "very modest," we should then inform the delegates that we should break off negotiations at Khamba Jong and resume them at the capital.

The Cabinet desired to restrict the scope to the negotiations to frontier questions and trade relations, and objected to the location of a Political Agent either at Lhasa or at Gyantze being included in the British proposals. To their instructions in these respects they added that no threat which would in any way bind them to a definite course of compulsion in the future should accompany the proposals submitted to the Conference. They desired, in short, that the matter should be treated as a purely local one, and dissented altogether from the Viceroy's views that it was necessary to give a much wider scope to the negotiations.

In these circumstances Lord Curzon expected little progress to be made. Even before he was instructed not to use threats he was not hopeful. ". . . I shall not be surprised if the matter spins on for many months; perhaps, even till the late autumn or winter," he wrote on May the 7th; and when reporting two months later that the Chinese and Tibetan delegates were said at last to be on the way to Khamba Jong, he added—"But do not be surprised if many months elapse before any real advance is made. We enter

## CURZON, 1903

the arena with our hands tied behind our backs by His Majesty's Government."<sup>1</sup>

His forecast was fulfilled to the actual letter, and he looked on with a certain amused toleration as week after week went by and he saw the day drawing steadily nearer when the Government would be compelled by the inexorable logic of events to sanction the course which he had originally advised. By the end of October all hope of anything being effected at Khamba Jong was abandoned, and the Government of India gave it as their deliberate opinion that an immediate advance as far as Gyantze was now inevitable.

Following upon Mr. Chamberlain's crusade in favour of Imperial federation on a customs tariff basis, changes had recently been made in the Government at Home. Lord Curzon's lifelong friend, St. John Brodrick, had succeeded Lord George Hamilton at the India Office, and the places of the stalwart Free Traders in the Cabinet had been taken by others who were less shackled with the chains of economic orthodoxy. But on the question of Tibet the reconstituted Cabinet was at one with that which had preceded it, and it was with anything but satisfaction that news was received of the turn which events were taking. It was felt, however, that it would be difficult to ignore the recent conduct of the Tibetans, and an advance to Gyantze—the first step in the series of events which ultimately took Colonel Younghusband and his Mission to Lhasa—was reluctantly sanctioned. But sanction was accompanied by a caveat that the Mission was to return at the earliest possible moment and was to lead to no permanent intervention in the affairs of Tibet.

The frontier was crossed on December the 13th, but the progress of the Mission was slow, being impeded by constant attacks made on it by large bodies of armed Tibetans, and it was not until April the 11th, 1904, that Colonel Younghusband and his following at last reached Gyantze. There he was destined to spend three futile months, and there, for the time being, we may leave him.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, July 8th, 1903.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MORE GRAVE ISSUES

MARCH—OCTOBER 1903

LORD CURZON found himself in a position of some difficulty on the eve of his departure from Calcutta in the spring of 1903. He was uncertain whether the speech which he intended delivering at the close of the Legislative Session was to be his official farewell to the Council. The question of an extension had been mooted, and he had asked that he might be informed of the Prime Minister's intentions. But he was without definite information on the point when the Session came to an end, and when forwarding a copy of his speech to the Secretary of State he explained the nature of the predicament in which he had been placed. "I have presided for six hours at the Budget meeting of the Legislative Council," he wrote on the night of March the 25th.

" I have delivered a speech at it of over an hour in length ; I have done several hours' work, and now I am in the train speeding away from Calcutta after one of the most laborious seasons that I have yet gone through. So large a number of spectators came to hear me deliver what they thought would be my last speech in the Council at Calcutta, that we could not hold the meeting in the Council Room, but had to move to the Throne Room, the first instance of such a change of venue for many years. I send you a copy of what I said. The obscure replies of Balfour to my questions about my own fate rendered it impossible for me to speak in anything but oracular tones about the future ; and my audience were left in the dark as to

## CURZON, 1903

whether the programme of reform which I sketched would be carried out by myself, or perhaps dropped by my successor."

Nevertheless, he succeeded in delivering a speech, not only conceived on "a loftier plane than any of his previous Budget speeches,"<sup>1</sup> but affording "a fresh revelation"—if such were needed in India—"of the extraordinary breadth and variety of the Viceroy's intellectual activities."<sup>2</sup> While it was noticed that he covered the whole field of Indian policy, past and present, and admitted that what Lord Curzon said on each aspect of Indian administration deserved the closest attention, it was widely recognised that the unusual interest of the speech lay in its concluding paragraphs on the growing importance of the position which the Indian Empire was coming to occupy in the politics of the world—paragraphs which were characterised as "pregnant with statesmanlike imagination."<sup>3</sup> Comment on these lines was not confined to the press in India. In England *The Times*, which had recently published a series of articles on the Middle Eastern Question by a Special Correspondent,<sup>4</sup> asserted that the real importance of the speech lay in "the grave note of warning as to the changes occurring in the international position of India and the watchfulness which they impose upon Indian and British statesmen." In Lord Curzon, it was observed, India possessed a statesman who was equipped with a knowledge of general politics, and especially of Asiatic politics, such as no previous Viceroy could claim, and such as never before was so imperatively called for. Some doubt was expressed whether the problems to which Lord Curzon had referred had engaged the attention of the Government at Home to the extent to which they deserved; and the writer of the article concluded by urging that due weight should be given to Lord Curzon's "pregnant warning that if, in order to avoid trouble at home, the Indian Government is restrained from taking the precautionary measures necessary in view of Russian activity, this country takes upon itself a heavy responsibility for the consequences which their neglect must some day impose upon India."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Times of India*, March 29th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, March 26th, 1903.

<sup>3</sup>*The Englishman*, March 27th, 1903.

<sup>4</sup>Mr., afterwards Sir, Valentine Chirol.

<sup>5</sup>*The Times* of March 26th, 1903.

## MORE GRAVE ISSUES

The speech certainly excited very widespread interest. Lord Curzon himself was always at his best on such occasions. His comprehensive grasp of India's manifold problems, his retentive memory, his absorption in his task and his profound belief in its inherent greatness, combined with his unusual command of language, endowed his utterances with persuasive eloquence and exhilarating force. In the spring of 1903 he was fortunate in finding himself in a position to disarm completely the most vociferous of his critics. He came before the Indian public as the author of the first appreciable reduction of taxation which had been made in India for twenty years. With obvious satisfaction he exposed the hollowness of the lamentations of the pessimists—adherents of a school of thought with which “the poverty of the Indian peasant, the decline of the country, and, I may almost say, its ultimate ruin, have almost become an article of political belief, based on sentiment rather than reason and impervious to the evidence of facts.” He invited the attention of such Jeremiahs to the rapid recovery from years of scarcity of which the country had proved capable, as evidenced by the brimming surplus of the past twelve months. And he proclaimed his own faith in its future—“As little by little we get forward I would crown every milestone on the path with roses instead of wetting it with tears.”

It was with no little satisfaction that he indulged in a brief survey of the past. The currency policy which had been adopted was succeeding, and was “bringing back confidence to every branch of Indian finance and trade.” His frontier policy had so far “been fortunate.” The Punjab Land Alienation Act was “succeeding beyond expectation,” while the industrial legislation which had been undertaken “was bearing good fruit.” Much had already been done—and, as a result of the exhaustive enquiry carried through by the Famine Commission, still more would be done in the future—to minimise the evils of drought. But when he was asked, as he had been in the course of the day's debate, to strike at the root of the evil from which the masses of the people suffered by preventing the recurrence of famine, he was being credited with powers to which he could make no claim. “To ask any Government to prevent the occurrence of famine in a country, the meteorological conditions

## CURZON, 1903

of which are what they are here, is to ask us to wrest the keys of the Universe from the hands of the Almighty."

Turning to the future, Lord Curzon had something to say about eight different reforms which were now engaging his attention. On some of these Commissions of Enquiry had been sitting—University reform, Irrigation, Police—and there awaited him "the onerous and responsible task of translating so much of their recommendations as we may decide to accept into practice." With regard to the reform of the police, the main improvement, which was a moral one, could not be expected all at once. "Men are on the whole what their surroundings make them, and men do what their opportunities permit. It is not all in a moment that you can take one section of a society and create in it a different standard from that which prevails in another, even if you pay the former to look after the morals of the other. We shall, I hope, get a purer and a better police as a consequence of the changes that we shall introduce; but we shall not straightway found a new Jerusalem until we have educated the people who are to build and inhabit it." The separation of Judicial and Executive functions; the creation of Co-operative Credit Societies; the introduction of greater efficiency into the administration of the railways, which had now "climbed out of the cradle," and already produced a recurring annual surplus; the establishment of a Commercial Bureau and the scientific manipulation of finance—"and by finance I do not mean those calculations which must inevitably lurk in the background of all the proposals that I have hitherto discussed, but the principles that regulate our control and dispensation of the Indian revenues"—all these questions were enumerated in ordered sequence, and set before the public as the salient items in the programme which the Government had now before it.

Perhaps the finest passages of the speech, from a rhetorical point of view, were the peroration on the position of India in the world, to which reference has already been made, and the glowing vindication of the Delhi Durbar, which has been quoted in an earlier chapter. In his letter to Lady Curzon describing his speech he wrote—"I think you will regard my vindication of the Durbar as complete." She was delighted with it; but the fact that such a

## MORE GRAVE ISSUES

vindication should be necessary set her wondering if people realised that the Durbar was a great symbol of the unity and majesty of the Indian Empire, or if it was regarded, generally, as a mere display.

"So much nonsense has been written, and it seems to me that it is only in your speeches that the higher plane has been reached." She was fearful lest the real aim might be overlooked in the maze of foolish chatter—"and perhaps your great motive remain unappreciated while the small minded remember only the stage management."<sup>1</sup>

It was in keeping with the rapid descent from exaltation to depression to which Lord Curzon was liable, that his reply should have been characterised by a cynicism as frigid as the faith with which he had spoken had been fervid. "As to what you say about the Durbar, I do not imagine that one person in a thousand looks at it from my point of view, or even regards it except—in the case of the vulgar—as a show—in the case of the more cultured—as a pageant. Its effect upon my reputation would, I should think, in the popular estimation be no more than this : that I am a first rate organiser, a magnificent State Barnum, an Imperial Buffalo Bill."<sup>2</sup>

There is no need to attach undue importance to occasional outbursts of this kind. They were to a large extent temperamental. But there is a certain significance attaching to them at this time, for they were, in part at least, the outcome of the increasing bitterness with which Lord Curzon's outlook was becoming clouded. The same thing is deducible from the tone which was now invading his private correspondence. Though there were protestations on each side that personal friendship lay outside official controversies, yet there is little doubt that constant differences on questions of policy were beginning to leave their mark on the more intimate side of the relations between Lord Curzon and his friends.

On the question of an extension of his term of office, the Prime Minister found it impossible to give a final decision until the middle of June. Lord Curzon was no doubt inconvenienced by the resulting uncertainty as to his own future. But he interpreted the Prime Minister's hesitation to commit himself quite needlessly as an indication that the value of his work in India was not adequately appreciated in England ; and he overlooked the real cause of the delay in

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 2nd, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated April 5th, 1903.

coming to a decision, which must have been plain enough to his friends at home. "The Government bails are still balanced on the wicket," Lord Selborne wrote in April, "though tipped out of their grooves. We may hit our own wicket down but the other side can only bowl wides." Mr. Chamberlain's outspoken advocacy of a revolutionary change in the fiscal policy of the country, in the course of a speech at Birmingham on May the 15th, made it clear, indeed, that a Cabinet crisis was not far off. And there was some excuse for the witty assertion of Mr. T. P. O'Connor—who looked forward to the Irish Party in the House of Commons figuring in the congenial rôle of *Tertius gaudens*—that Lord Curzon's seat on the stately elephant was at the mercy of the Mayo peasant riding on the humble ass.

And delay in arriving at a decision with regard to his own future was only one of a number of disturbing subjects which thrust themselves between Lord Curzon and his friends at home. "I know you were very angry with your special friends in the Cabinet, for differing from you on one or two very important points," Lord Selborne told him on April the 24th; "but I really don't think this is reasonable. There is no use in discussing who was right and who was wrong. This machine of ours can only be run on the partnership principle, and partners will inevitably sometimes differ in opinion. . . Moreover, you would commit a colossal error if you supposed that because St. John, or George, or I, could not agree with you on one or more important points through the vile medium of correspondence, therefore we did not feel the utmost pride in your work in India and believe you to be the best Viceroy India has ever had." Lord Curzon accepted the letter in the spirit in which it was written, but challenged the correctness of the writer's impressions. "You are quite mistaken if you think that I was very angry with my special friends in the Cabinet for differing from me on one or two very important points. I can assure you that I have no such feeling. In public life differences of opinion must occur even between the closest friends; and a man would be unfit to take part in it who was not prepared to accept this situation. What I did feel, and feel deeply" (a reference once more to the refusal of the Cabinet to sanction an announcement at the Durbar of a remission of taxation) "was the apparent willingness of my friends to break my career on

## MORE GRAVE ISSUES

a point which seemed to me, at any rate, of quite minor constitutional importance."<sup>1</sup> To which Lord Selborne replied on June the 6th—" This is not an argumentative letter but one to define my own position. . . . You feel deeply 'the apparent willingness of your friends to break your career.' Dear George, you cannot possibly imagine that we ever had such a prospect before us as a possible result of our action. I said I was not going to be argumentative and I will keep my word. All, therefore, I say is that from your own point of view you may damn our intelligence but not our affection."

No one felt the deepening shadow of estrangement more acutely than St. John Brodrick. And, quite apart from the question of the Durbar announcement which had brought the two into such sharp collision, there was now grave disagreement on the question of the charges to be imposed upon India in connection with the army. With the inevitable reaction following on the conclusion of the South African war, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find, under a voluntary system, the number of reserves required to feed the Indian and Colonial garrisons, and, as Secretary of State for War, St. John Brodrick had found it necessary to authorise an offer of additional pay. Lord Curzon had vehemently protested against any part of this fresh burden being placed upon the revenues of India, and the matter had been submitted to the arbitration of the Lord Chief Justice of England. The award of the latter had gone against the Government of India, and had rendered the revenues of India liable to additional charges, amounting to upwards of £750,000, a year.

Lord Curzon's irritation at this imposition had not died down when he received intimation of a further proposal, put forward by the Defence Committee in London and approved by the Government, for providing India with reinforcements in case of an emergency. Briefly, the proposal was for the retention in South Africa of a force of British troops on which India would be entitled to draw to the extent of 12,500 men. In return for these facilities she would be asked to contribute a moiety of the additional cost entailed in keeping the proposed force in South Africa, amounting to a sum of £400,000 a year. The chances of Lord Curzon accepting the scheme

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated May 18, 1903

## CURZON, 1903

were undoubtedly prejudiced by its announcement in the House of Commons, within twenty-four hours of the Government of India being officially apprised of it, and before it was possible for them to express an opinion on it. But it was, in any case, speedily rejected on its merits as a result of the view entertained by Lord Kitchener, that at a time of emergency the troops would in all probability be required in South Africa itself, and would not be available, in consequence, for service in India. And a decision in this sense was telegraphed to the Secretary of State. Lord George Hamilton had written strongly in favour of the project, and the annoyance which he felt at the blunt refusal of the Government of India to countenance it was greatly increased by an unfortunate leakage in India—at which the Viceroy expressed equal concern—which resulted in the appearance in the newspapers, within a day or two of the despatch of the Government of India's telegram, of a pretty complete exposure of their attitude towards the plan. Lord George Hamilton thought that there must have been "some very gross carelessness" on the part of someone, to have allowed a reporter to know the decision of the Indian Government on so confidential a matter. "And this," he added in a letter on the subject, "on the top of your refusal has reduced my colleagues to a state of great irritation."

In one way and another—and not least as a result of his own announcement in the House of Commons—an impression was created that the Secretary of State for War was endeavouring to secure from India a contribution towards an object—the retention of an adequate garrison in South Africa—which ought to have been met out of Imperial revenues, and Imperial revenues alone, a state of affairs of which Lord George Hamilton thought it right to inform the Viceroy. "Since, however, your telegram has been published, he (St. John Brodrick) has been subject in a number of papers to a series of gross attacks, and just in proportion as he is abused, so are you eulogised."<sup>1</sup>

In such circumstances it was inevitable that these unfortunate controversies should cast a shadow over their private relations. St. John Brodrick complained that the trouble over the South African garrison scheme, coming on top of the Despatch from the

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August 6th, 1903.

## MORE GRAVE ISSUES

Government of India on the subject of the increase in the army pay, had made him suffer "very heavily at the hands of the Indian press," and had made the difficulty of harmonious working greater than ever. He and others amongst the Viceroy's personal friends in the Cabinet felt that they had legitimate grounds for complaint. "You are pressing for a most vigorous policy in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. Your army even in normal times has been pronounced inadequate by one committee after another... Honestly we thought, I especially, that, while teaching us the benefit of a vigorous policy, you would endeavour to teach India the necessity of adequately supporting it. Instead we surely have a right to say you have done the reverse ; and we feel it hardly fair that the oppressed India whose champion you are and whom you defend from exactions, knows nothing of the strong measures which you call upon us to adopt."<sup>1</sup>

It was hardly a happy prelude to his appointment to the India Office on Lord George Hamilton's resignation six weeks later. And it is easy to understand that his acceptance of the Prime Minister's invitation was dictated by a high sense of duty. But apart from this, the widening gulf between his lifelong friend and the Government at home was causing him grave distress, and he entered upon his new duties with a firm determination to use his influence to the utmost to heal the breach which he so deplored. On the eve of his appointment, and before the Prime Minister's choice was known, he wrote to Lady Curzon—"I have had two kind letters from George. I cannot write this mail ; but I know he has no secrets from you. And I am sure you will have realised how much I have minded the pulling different ways which has arisen twice this year between us—once when he wrote me the, as I thought, least just letter I ever had from him, and recently when at a moment when I least needed it, I have been dealt a very severe blow. I only want him to know that I regard both as the accident of office and that I have no *arrière pensée* except that I hope that circumstances will not be so unkind to us again."<sup>2</sup>

If in the end he had to admit the failure of his fondest hope, it was because circumstances proved to be too strong for him.

<sup>1</sup>Letter from St. John Brodrick, August 19th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated September 24th, 1903.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A GREAT REFORMER

APRIL—OCTOBER 1903

It has been necessary to write at some length of Foreign Affairs, and it will be necessary to return to the subject shortly, since such matters played a predominant part during the closing years of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that Lord Curzon allowed his preoccupation with these important questions to deter him from prosecuting, with all his customary vigour, the programme of administrative reform which he had set before himself. It is a mistake which might easily be made, for the questions of our relations with Afghanistan, Persia and Tibet attracted a large share of public attention, whereas little was heard by the outside public generally of the great changes which Lord Curzon was labouring to bring about in the internal administration of the country, or of the long hours of patient and sustained endeavour which he devoted to improving the lot of the toiling masses and to increasing the material prosperity of the country as a whole.

He has, indeed, not infrequently—though most unjustly—been depicted as a Prancing Proconsul, indifferent to the sorrows and sufferings of the vast population committed to his charge, driven by a vaulting ambition into reckless enterprises and consumed with a passion for personal aggrandisement. Nothing could be further from the truth. And it is right that the high ideals of service towards the teeming peoples of the Indian continent, which he ever kept in view, and the strenuous endeavours which he made to give effect to them, should be properly understood. That the summer of

## A GREAT REFORMER

1903 was a troubled one for Lord Curzon personally, and that its sky was heavily overcast with clouds from beyond the Indian frontiers, has been made clear. That he should in such circumstances have found it possible to do so much for the material advancement of the people is, in itself, a striking refutation of the extravagant charges which have sometimes been brought against him.

On his arrival at the summer capital at the beginning of his fifth season in what he had once described as the "Simla workshop," he summed up the main items in the programme of work which he had drawn up; and he reported the result to the Secretary of State—

" . . . there lie before me the final stages of many of the biggest reforms which I have taken in hand, and the carrying out of which would almost supply enough to fill a single Administration. I allude more particularly to the reforms consequent on the Reports of the various Commissions that we have appointed, upon (1) Education, (2) Irrigation, (3) Railways, and (4) Police. In each of these cases profound study and anxious consideration will be required in order to lay the foundations of a system that ought to satisfy the country for the next quarter of a century. In each there will be a vast amount of evidence to study, Local Governments to consult, conflicting views to be examined, and, if possible, reconciled, broad lines of future policy laid down."<sup>1</sup>

The reforms recommended by these various Commissions were now taken in hand. Legislation designed to facilitate the reconstruction of the Universities was drafted during the summer. The Bill was introduced on November the 4th, and, as has already been explained, became law in March 1904. Advantage was also taken of the progress made with the reform of the educational system generally to make available to the public, in an easily accessible form, a comprehensive review of the whole position, so that all might know upon what lines the Government were proceeding, how far they had gone and what was the goal which they had in view. Lord Curzon aimed at doing in respect of education what he had already done with such success in respect of Land Revenue Settlement and

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 30th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

Administration by his famous Resolution of January 1902. He had long desired, he told the Secretary of State, to frame a State Paper which would stand on record "as a summary of our position and policy at the dawn of the 20th century." The summer of 1903 saw the accomplishment of this ambition, though for various reasons the document was not published until March of the following year.

During the same period Lord Curzon was able to submit to the Secretary of State an exhaustive Despatch, detailing the policy, for which he had made himself responsible, for the improvement of agriculture; and a little later he had the satisfaction of seeing a Bill for the creation of agricultural banks successfully piloted through the Legislature. No more fantastic charge was ever brought against him than the accusation that his policy was "pushing the mass of the agricultural population lower and lower in the slough of misery and starvation";<sup>1</sup> for it is not too much to say that it was Lord Curzon who insisted on agriculture and the agricultural population being given the high place in the care of the Government which their extent and importance called for.

Very early in his term of office he had realised the extent of the evil of agricultural indebtedness, which he had characterised as "a canker eating into the vitals of the national life"; and he had determined to do all that lay within his power to remedy it. In the Punjab the land was passing with alarming rapidity away from the peasantry and into the hands of the moneylender. He did not deny the necessity for a moneylending class as part of the existing organisation of agrarian life in India; but he did emphatically deny any necessity for the Shylock who insisted upon his pound of flesh and, in the absence of legislation to hinder him from doing so, was in the habit of taking it in land. And the Bill which he introduced and eventually carried through in October 1900, under the title of the Punjab Land Alienation Act, was regarded by him as the first serious step in a movement which was designed to free the cultivating

<sup>1</sup>The accusation was actually made by an anonymous pamphleteer in a monograph entitled "The Failure of Lord Curzon," published in 1903. The pamphlet was in reality an attack upon the Land Revenue system of India, on the lines made familiar by Mr. R. C. Dutt and his school of thought, with the addition of a liberal display of venom against Lord Curzon personally, on the score of what was depicted as his autocratic meddlesomeness in the internal affairs of India, and his vainglorious Imperialism beyond its borders.

## A GREAT REFORMER

classes—"the bone and sinew of our strength"—from the incubus which was slowly but surely wearing them down. He refused to be moved by the lamentation of those who represented the interests of the Capitalist class. "Every age and every epoch has had its Cassandra; and I do not complain of my Hon. friend (The Hon. Sir Harnam Singh) for donning the familiar garb. I venture, however, to think that if his superlatives had been fewer, his invective would have been more convincing, and that his vaticinations will be found to have been a good deal exaggerated."<sup>1</sup>

The question was one which it required some courage to tackle, as Lord George Hamilton was quick to see. "The subject to be dealt with," he wrote on August the 3rd, 1899, "is like a porcupine; and do what we like, and from whatever point we endeavour to attack the evil to be overcome, we are sure to some extent to hurt ourselves." Expert opinion had been by no means unanimous as to the expediency of the measure while its provisions were still on the anvil in Simla and Whitehall; and there had been a tendency on the part of the India Council to press for a Bill which should be permissive rather than of general application. Against this limitation Lord Curzon had strongly protested, since the chief value of the proposal lay, in his opinion, in its general operation; and it was due to his powerful advocacy and insistence that the more comprehensive measure which he considered essential was agreed to and eventually passed into law.

The operation of the Act was necessarily accompanied by some curtailment of credit; and the object of the legislation which Lord Curzon now pressed forward was to restore the credit system "while avoiding the evils which have sprung from the great expansion of credit caused by the conferment of the full right of transfer of land upon classes untrained to its exercise."<sup>2</sup> He did not expect immediate or startling success for the system of agricultural co-operative credit which he sought to establish; but he attached the utmost importance to the introduction of the principle. "Let us contemplate in districts, or towns, or villages here and there, a few of these institutions (Agricultural Co-operative Credit Societies)

<sup>1</sup>Speech on the passing of the Bill, October 19th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Speech on the passing of the Co-operative Credit Societies Bill, March 23rd, 1904.

## CURZON, 1903

coming into existence and gradually striking their roots into the soil. Each tree so rooted will ultimately cast its own shade and will be the parent of others.”<sup>1</sup>

Fifteen years afterwards, I had many opportunities of observing the fruit of the tree which Lord Curzon had thus planted. As he anticipated, progress had not been rapid, but it had nevertheless been striking. In Bengal alone, by the year 1918, 100,000 cultivators had obtained credit for something like 10,000,000 rupees, at rates varying from one-fifth to one-twentieth of the rate which they had been compelled to pay before, and had created reserve funds, or in other words had effected savings of over 1,000,000 rupees. More surprising still were some of what may be described as the by-products of the movement. In one case which came to my notice, the members of a Co-operative Society, composed of Muhammadan cultivators, assembled in a mosque and spontaneously pledged themselves never again to insist on a villager giving a ceremonial feast, and never again to accept an invitation to a feast provided by borrowed money. No one who is acquainted with the tyranny of custom in this respect or of the drain which such custom imposes on the resources of the people will be likely to underestimate the significance of this decision.

The improvement of agriculture and of the lot of the cultivator was, indeed, constantly in Lord Curzon’s mind. He created an Imperial Agricultural Department and appointed an Inspector General; he founded the now famous Agricultural Institute at Pusa and endowed it with an expert staff for agricultural education and research, and he urged the establishment of similar research stations with experimental farms in every Indian province; he instituted agricultural schools and colleges and expanded and improved the pay of the Agricultural Service; he did much for the improvement of cotton cultivation and for the encouragement of cattle breeding on better lines. During his term of office he was responsible for remissions of land revenue to meet distress amounting in all to 35,000,000 rupees or approximately £2,333,000.

The circumstances attending the creation of the Agricultural Institute at Pusa provide a striking commentary upon the criticism

<sup>1</sup>Speech on the passing of the Co-operative Credit Societies Bill, March 23rd, 1904.

## A GREAT REFORMER

that his policy was “pushing the mass of the agricultural population lower and lower in the slough of misery and starvation.” A scheme for such an institute was forming in the Viceroy’s mind, when he found himself the recipient of a remarkable gift of money, that provided the final stimulus which was required to give substance to it. An American traveller, Mr. H. Phipps, who had been touring in India during the winter of 1902-03, was so impressed by Lord Curzon’s solicitude for the welfare of the people, that he spontaneously offered him a sum of £20,000—subsequently increased to £30,000,—to be spent on any object which the Viceroy considered would be for the permanent good of India. When Lord Curzon put forward his scheme for an Institute where might be centralised the various branches of scientific work which he desired to see devoted to the improvement of the staple industry of the continent, Mr. Phipps telegraphed his hearty approval accompanied by a few words of explanation—“I am much pleased with the excellent choice you have made. In my judgment none could be better. . . . May I add that your ability, devotion to duty and solicitude for the welfare of the natives, have influenced me in the step I am taking.”<sup>1</sup> Armed with such disinterested and unsolicited testimony to the value of his work for the agricultural population, Lord Curzon could afford to smile indulgently at the demonstrations of a whole army of anonymous knights of the pen.

Time was required to elaborate the plan and collect the expert staff required, and it was not until the 1st of April, 1905, that Lord Curzon laid the foundation stone of the Phipps Research Laboratory at Pusa. He came at the end of an exhausting Calcutta season, worn with physical suffering, to play his part in a long and tiring day. On arrival, after a sleepless night in the train, he appeared to those who welcomed him a tired man. Before the day was over they realised what a tired man of Lord Curzon’s amazing courage and sense of duty was capable of. From the moment that the business of the day began Lord Curzon was seen at his best, receiving deputations, giving interviews to visitors, performing ceremonies and making speeches. To the three set speeches which he was billed to deliver he added a fourth in reply to the toast of his health informally proposed

<sup>1</sup> Telegram dated February 19th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1905

at luncheon. And this fourth speech in which he enlarged with sympathetic understanding and appreciation upon the work of members of the various Services, leading hard and lonely lives in the remote districts of the Indian Provinces, was, in the opinion of those who heard it, one of the brightest and most encouraging to which his subordinates had ever listened.<sup>1</sup>

When laying the foundation stone of the new building, Lord Curzon observed that the number of respects in which science was capable of being applied to the agricultural and economic development of a continent like India, was almost infinite. And he expressed the hope that, as time went on, each Local Government would follow the example being set that day, and would create its own Institute for experiment and research. Here again Fate threw me in the way of seeing the fruit produced by the tree which Lord Curzon planted. The hope which he entertained saw fulfilment, and by the year 1920 results had already been obtained, at the Government experimental farm at Dacca in Eastern Bengal, which are destined to have a far reaching effect upon the agricultural resources of the Presidency. As a result of patient and sustained research "pure-line" cultures of the staple crops of India have been produced, giving in every case yields far in excess of the varieties hitherto grown. By the year 1918-19 an improved variety of jute was being grown on 100,000 acres in Bengal, the additional yield of fibre on this area being estimated at over 20,000,000 lb. and the additional value at £135,000. During the same year improved varieties of rice were grown on 250,000 acres, with the result that the yield of rice was increased by over 60,000,000 lb. and the value of the crop by £200,000. The true significance of these figures becomes apparent when it is remembered that round the head of the Bay of Bengal lies one of the greatest rice producing tracts in the world, extending over an area of more than 20,000,000 acres. If Lord Curzon had done nothing else during his Viceroyalty than create the organisation which makes possible such results as these, he would have deserved the gratitude of India.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. P. C. Lyon, C.S.I., who was Commissioner of the Patna Division at the time, has told me of the tremendous impression which Lord Curzon made upon those present, who were well aware of the terrible strain which, in the circumstances, was imposed upon him.

## A GREAT REFORMER

Closely allied to agriculture was the question of irrigation, the importance of which Lord Curzon had been quick to recognise. It had, in fact, been given a place among the twelve subjects of his original programme, of which he had made mention in his first Budget speech in 1899. His first step had been to increase the capital expenditure on such works from £500,000 to £625,000 a year. But he was not insensible to the practical aspect of the case. When he reached India in 1899, his enquiries showed him that about nineteen million acres were already under irrigation, the capital outlay involved being £25,500,000. Expert opinion held that the total additional land which it might be possible to bring under irrigation was not likely to exceed four million acres. When, however, within a few months of his assumption of office, he had been called upon to cope with a serious famine, he had turned his attention to the possibility of an enlarged programme of protective irrigation and water storage works, and in the spring of 1901 had announced a comprehensive investigation of all possible irrigation projects in famine areas, as a preliminary to the appointment of a Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff in the ensuing winter.

A year later what he described as "the most momentous of our recent Commissions" was sitting. "So vast is the field," he told the public, "so complex the subject, so enormously important may be the results, that a second cold weather will be required before the Commission has completed its labours." And now, with the Report of the Commission before him, as he sat at his desk in Simla during the summer of 1903, he came regretfully to the conclusion that some time longer must elapse before it would be possible to pass orders on its recommendations. "We shall not be able to deal with the Report of the Irrigation Commission, which is very complex and requires minute study, until next year," he wrote on October the 2nd. When decisions were at last taken on its recommendations, they were found to involve the acceptance of a far reaching programme of construction, at an estimated capital cost of £30,000,000, spread over a period of twenty years.

In a speech delivered at a meeting of the Legislative Council in March 1903 Lord Curzon declared that he had found the Report to

the Commission "infinitely more interesting than a novel," for it dealt not with the hypothetical problems of human character, but with "the positive agencies that affect the growth or decline of human life; and it bases conclusions dramatic in their sweep upon premises of scientific precision." With his methodical mind Lord Curzon probed deep into the practical possibilities of the future, and the result of the calculations which he caused to be made was sufficiently startling. Of the total average rainfall of India thirty-five per cent., and of the total surface flow as much as eighty-seven per cent. was carried away by rivers to the sea. The programme of irrigation works which the Government were now adopting, large though it was, would utilise at the most a little more than two per cent. of the vast surface flow. The remainder would continue its aimless and unarrested descent to the ocean. Why so? it might be asked. His reply to this question provides an admirable example of the lucid exposition of which Lord Curzon was so great a master.

"Rain does not always fall in India in the greatest volume where it is most needed. What Cherrapungi could easily spare, Rajputana cannot for all the wealth of Croesus obtain. Neither does rain fall all through the year in India. . . . Sometimes where water is most plentiful there is no use for it because of the sterile, or forbidding, or unsuitable nature of the soil. Sometimes it flows down in blind superfluity through a country already intersected with canals. Sometimes it meanders in riotous plenty through alluvial plains where storage is impossible. Sometimes again the cost of storage is so tremendous as to be absolutely prohibitive. These are some, though by no means all, of the reasons which place an unexpugnable barrier to the realisation of academic dreams. Facts of this sort we may deprecate but cannot ignore; and the time will never come when we can harness all that wealth of misspent and futile power and convert it to the use of man. What we can do the Commission have told us; what we mean to do I have endeavoured imperfectly to sketch out in these remarks. Restricted as is the programme when measured against the prodigious resources of Nature, it is yet the maximum pro-

## A GREAT REFORMER

gramme open to human agency and to finite powers, and it is one that may well appeal either to the enthusiasm of the individual or to the organised ability of the State. We are about to embark on it with the consciousness that we are not merely converting the gifts of Providence to the service of man, but that we are labouring to reduce human suffering and, in times of calamity, to rescue and sustain millions of human lives.”<sup>1</sup>

The programme, recommended by Sir C. Scott-Moncrief’s Commission and accepted by the Government, provided for the irrigation of an additional area of six and a half millions of acres at an estimated capital cost of forty-four crores of rupees or approximately £30,000,000. Throughout his Viceroyalty the actual work of construction was pushed forward, under his orders, at a rapid rate. Large additions were made to the protective works, the projects of this character which were either in progress or were sanctioned during his term of office being estimated to affect 350,000 acres of land, at a cost of 230 lakhs of rupees ; while it was calculated that the productive works in progress, or sanctioned, would add three and a half millions of acres to the total amount of irrigated land in India, at a capital cost of twelve and three-quarter crores of rupees or £8,500,000.

Another report for the consideration of which he found time—though not without difficulty—during the summer of 1903, was that on railways, drawn up by Mr. T. Robertson, an expert for whose services Lord Curzon had asked. “ Soon after I get back to Simla,” he wrote from camp in Kumaon, whither he had gone for a brief holiday, “ I shall hope to get off our long delayed Despatch on Robertson’s report. . . I have it here with me in camp. But it is a little hard after nine hours in the saddle to sit down to write a letter like this ; much more so to revolutionise the railway administration of an Empire.”<sup>2</sup> A day or two later he told Lady Curzon that he was remaining in camp, “ completing my long Note about Robertson’s railway report and the future railway administration of India.”

<sup>1</sup>Speech at a meeting of Legislative Council, March 31st, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, September 28th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

Lord Curzon had no wish to minimise the truly remarkable results which had been achieved in the past ; and, in the Despatch from the Government of India to the Secretary of State, in which large changes in the system of administration were urged, considerable stress was laid on what had already been accomplished. It was pointed out that whereas India had been provided with 27,000 miles of railways at a cost of £230,000,000, the capital account of the 22,000 miles of railway in Great Britain had reached the huge total of £1,216,000,000 ; and that, while the Indian railway system was worked for forty-nine and a quarter per cent. of its gross earnings and gave a return of approximately five per cent. on its total capital, the English railways showed a working cost of sixty-two per cent. and gave a return of less than three and a half per cent. on the capital ; that these results had been obtained although the rate charged by the Indian railways for carrying the third-class passenger was but one quarter, and the average rate for carrying commodities one third, of the charges made by the English railways for the same services.

But, in spite of these results, Lord Curzon had clearly perceived, even before the advice of Mr. Robertson had been invited, that the railway system had outgrown the machinery designed to deal with it, and that a radical change in the system of control was called for. And his condemnation of the system, as distinct from its personnel, was sufficiently scathing—" Were Sir Norman Lockyer, or anyone else who desires to apply science to business, to seek an illustration of a form of railway administration calculated to impede enterprise at every turn, he could hardly find a better example than that over which we jointly preside." And he warned the Secretary of State that, if there was to be any reform of the system, if a Railway Board was to be constituted, and if it was to enjoy any greater independence or prerogative than the existing Public Works Department, it could only be by a surrender of some of the powers and restraints exercised by the Secretary of State in England.<sup>1</sup>

The recommendations made by the Government of India, in a Despatch dated January the 7th, 1904, met with some criticism in London ; " I am trying to lay down a certain number of points

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, October 2nd, 1903.

## A GREAT REFORMER

which would enable our Despatch not to conflict with yours," the Secretary of State wrote on February the 26th, 1904. And the final orders issued in August 1904 were drawn up at the India Office in light of a Note penned by Lord Curzon himself at the invitation of the Secretary of State, during the former's period of leave in England.

The outstanding reform effected was the creation in India of a Railway Board of experts to manage the railways, the Board being outside of, though subordinate to, the Government of India in a new Department of Government formed to deal with commerce and industry, in accordance with proposals made by the Viceroy in October 1903. And one of the last acts of Lord Curzon's Government was to accept, and obtain the sanction of the Secretary of State for, the first triennial programme of the new Board, involving an annual outlay of fifteen crores of rupees—two and a half crores more than had ever been provided before—half of which was to be expended annually on the improvement of existing lines and half on the construction of new lines. It was estimated that under this programme an annual addition of 1,163 miles would be made to the open railway mileage of the continent.

The creation of a new Department under an additional Member to deal with Commerce and Industry was strongly urged by Lord Curzon before he left Simla in the autumn of 1903. "We cannot get on any longer without the change," he told the Secretary of State on October the 2nd. "I have stood out as long as possible with a Cabinet of only five members, not counting the Commander-in-Chief; but I cannot do it any longer. That we should administer the Indian Empire with an Executive of such microscopic proportions would everywhere be regarded as a joke, were it not an unfortunate reality. I have seen office work at home, and I assert that there is nothing there to be compared with the steady strain here—heavy not only because of its intrinsic character, but because our men rarely get any holiday from one year's end to another." The reform could not be carried through without legislation in England; and, during the discussion of the Bill in Parliament, Lord Curzon rose from a bed of sickness to go down to the House of Commons during his brief holiday in England to argue the case

## CURZON, 1903

with a group of members who were believed to be hostile to its passage.

The Simla season had, indeed, been one during which he had found it possible to put the finishing touches to many of the greatest reforms which he had taken in hand. And it was his remarkable achievements in the sphere of internal administration, carried through in face of growing anxieties beyond the Indian frontiers, that justified the claim which he made for his Government, at the close of a review of their work on the eve of his departure in the spring of 1904, for a short spell of rest in England.

"The Government of India in my time has been involved in many controversies and has had to bear the brunt of much attack. Perhaps when the smoke of battle has blown aside it may be found that from this period of stress and labour has emerged an India better equipped to face the many problems which confront her, stronger and better guarded on her frontiers, with her agriculture, her industries, her commerce, her education, her irrigation, her railways, her armies and her police brought up to a higher state of efficiency, with every section of her administrative machinery in better repair, with her credit re-established, her currency restored, the material prosperity of her people enhanced and their loyalty strengthened. We shall not deserve the main credit because we have profited by the efforts of those who have preceded us. But perhaps we may be allowed our share; and may feel that we have not toiled and sometimes endured in vain."<sup>1</sup>

That this claim was endorsed by all, at any rate, who attached greater importance to solid material progress than to the satisfaction of purely political aspirations, was evident from the chorus of approval with which—outside the Indian owned papers of Bengal—the news of Lord Curzon's extension was received. The announcement was made by the Viceroy himself in a brief speech at a meeting of the Legislative Council, early in August 1903, in the course of which he gave expression to the pride which he felt "at

<sup>1</sup>Speech at a meeting of the Legislative Council, March 23rd, 1904.

## A GREAT REFORMER

being permitted for some time longer . . . to assist in a task which I shall never cease to regard as the greatest and noblest that anywhere devolves upon the British race."

In the spring of 1903, after the announcement of the remission of taxation, there had been a very remarkable demonstration in which the whole Native press had joined, praying for a continuance of Lord Curzon in Office. "The Indian papers, English and native," he told Sir Ian Malcolm, in April, "are all publishing articles praying for my extension. Knowing India as you do and the general spirit of criticism, you will realise that this is a rare experience." But as the summer wore on, gratitude for financial mercies faded in Bengal in proportion as dislike of the provisions of the Universities Act waxed strong; and by July Lord Curzon had a different story to tell. "The Bengali Native press, which has never been quite certain whether I am the greatest friend or the worst enemy that India has ever had, has finally plumped for the latter alternative, and papers which a few months ago were clamouring for my extension are now shouting hoarsely for my recall."<sup>1</sup> And his forecast of the reception which his announcement of his extension would be likely to meet with, was as follows—"The Bengali newspapers will no doubt be much annoyed; but I think that you will find that the Native press generally will welcome the extension, while I doubt if there will be a dissentient voice among the English newspapers, although the satisfaction of the *Pioneer* will probably be of a very chastened description."<sup>2</sup>

His forecast proved accurate. "You will have seen my extension announced before now," he wrote in a letter to his brother on August the 12th. "It has been very well received throughout India, which, considering that most Viceroys leave after four or five years amid howls of disappointment and abuse and that I have done my duty despite of everybody, is really remarkable. There has been scarcely a dissentient voice . . . I don't feel very elated about it myself. The strain is so terrible and it grows greater instead of less."<sup>3</sup> And in a letter to Sir A. Godley he expressed his surprise at the unanimity of the press. "Even the Native papers who abused me

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, July 9th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Hon. F. N. Curzon.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., August 5th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

most have bowed their heads with tempered satisfaction."<sup>1</sup> The one critical note in the English press was sounded in the quarter in which he looked for it. "The *Pioneer* taunted me with having done nothing to equal the annexation of Burma by Lord Dufferin. Just imagine what they would have said if I had!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated August the 9th, 1903.      <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PERSIAN QUESTION

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1903

SOMETHING has been said in chapter IV of the vigorous action which Lord Curzon took, immediately after his arrival in India in 1899, to ward off the attacks of other Powers upon the predominant position of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf. His previous study of the Persian question had convinced him of the supreme importance of maintaining intact the position of political and commercial supremacy which we had been fortunate enough to acquire in those regions ; and his state of mind, when he pondered on the apathetic attitude of the Home Government towards what he regarded as an essential interest of the Empire, was one of chronic despair. "English policy towards Persia throughout this century," he exclaimed, as he cast his eye back in the spring of 1900, "has been a page of history which makes one alternatively laugh with derision and groan with despair."<sup>1</sup>

The delay of nine months which had occurred before a reply had been received to the comprehensive Despatch on the whole subject to which he had devoted so much time and thought during the summer of 1899 convinced him that the Cabinet were still insensible to the importance and urgency of the matter. And when, after constant reminders, a reply was at length received in July 1900, he found in it little to reassure him. His perusal of its carefully balanced paragraphs left him in a state of irritating uncertainty whether Lord Salisbury was in earnest or was merely playing for

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir A. Godley, March 15th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1900

time. "Your Persian Despatch has reached us," he told Lord George Hamilton, on July the 25th, "and as you will have expected, it wins no particular approbation from me." Certain statements which Lord Salisbury had authorised the British Minister in Tehran to make to the Persian Government, were good as far as they went. They contained in respect of declarations about ports, customs and railways the nucleus of the policy which Lord Curzon himself advocated. But were His Majesty's Government going to stand by them? "Are they platonic or are they practical? Do they represent a pious opinion or a consistent policy?" Lord Curzon was frankly sceptical. A visit to England which the Shah was contemplating might be made the test of the sincerity of the Government's protestations, and Lord Curzon wrote to Lord Salisbury, urging him not to let this golden opportunity slip through his fingers. "I wrote to Lord Salisbury, urging him to speak frankly to the Shah when the latter goes to England; but I confess that I have little hope of my advice being followed."<sup>1</sup>

In high political circles in England a discussion was in progress as to the propriety of admitting the Shah to the Order of the Garter. It was a proposal for which Lord Curzon himself had little liking. He thought it wrong in principle that the Order should be open to non-Christians; and, even if a special class was to be created for a limited number of non-Christian knights to which the Shah was to be admitted, he thought it savoured too much of an undignified attempt—and one moreover of very doubtful efficacy—to purchase the allegiance of a decrepit if picturesque oriental court. *Non tali anxilio.* Obsequiousness in such cases was not only unworthy of a great Power, but was little likely to attain its object. We earned no gratitude by our complacency; on the contrary, we acquired an unenviable reputation for malleability. He would much prefer that the Shah should be told politely but very firmly what was required of him. "We have many ways of making ourselves nasty to the Persians," he once reminded the Secretary of State. "There are all sorts of outstanding claims which we are constantly and feebly writing off."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, July 25th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated August 10th, 1902.

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

Irresolution consequent upon divided counsels in England resulted in the Garter being withheld during the Shah's visit ; in the latter departing in a state of irritation ; and in an eleventh hour attempt to placate him by the despatch of a Mission, under the leadership of Lord Downe, to confer upon him in Tehran the Decoration which had been withheld from him in London. The outcome was as Lord Curzon had predicted. Scarcely had Lord Downe shaken the dust of Tehran off his feet, when the Shah displayed his gratitude by ratifying a Commercial Convention with Russia, under which a tariff designed to further Russian and to injure British trade came into force, and by adopting an obstructive attitude towards the British Commissioners who had been appointed to arbitrate between the Persians and the Afghans in Sistan. "In Persia," wrote Lord George Hamilton, "we have tried cajolery and rewards ; the Shah accepts the Garter and then approves finally of the new Tariff without referring it to us for examination, and then, contrary to Treaty limitations, he gives permission to a Russian representative to accompany the Persian Mission" to Sistan.<sup>1</sup> The situation elicited from Lord Curzon a comment in the almost Rabelaisian style of humour into which his eternal boyishness occasionally betrayed him. "The Amir is behaving like a brick over Sistan," he told Lord Percy. "But the Shah appears to be applying the very leg upon which the Garter has just been bound by the chivalrous Downe, to that part of our person for which no respect is entertained by the subalterns of the Grenadier Guards."<sup>2</sup>

So exasperated did he become at the indecision displayed by the Government at home, that there were times when he would even have welcomed a Russian move in Northern Persia in the hope that it would spur His Majesty's Government to action in the south. "I am not particularly frightened of the disruption of Persia," he wrote on August the 10th, 1903. "The degree of speed with which Russia will absorb the northern part depends far more upon her preparedness than upon our provocation ; and I have often thought that it would not be a bad price to pay for anything that would goad us into a policy in the south." He was critical of the policy of blocks of interest, which was sometimes put forward as a solution of the

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated January 6th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated March 5th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

difficulty. "I have no liking for the compartment system—a British block Sistan to the Gulf; then a Russian block Kerman or Ispahan to the Gulf, and then again a British block Dizful to the Shat-el-Arab. As I have said let us bar the whole of the south or let us give up the game. A patchwork programme will go the way of all patchwork quilts."<sup>1</sup>

He had, in fact, never wavered from the opinion which he had formed as a private individual many years before, and had put forward with great emphasis in the pages of his book on Persia. The first necessity in his view was to exclude all potentially hostile influences from the Persian Gulf. "I should regard the concession of a port upon the Persian Gulf to Russia by any Power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain, as a wanton rupture of the *status quo* and as an intentional provocation to war; and I should impeach the British Minister who was guilty of acquiescing in such a surrender as a traitor to his country."<sup>2</sup> But this by itself was not enough. The territories which were washed by the waters of the Gulf and those which abutted on the frontier of India, must equally be kept free from hostile influences. And, with this object in view, he would frankly inform the Governments of Russia and Persia that any further encroachments by the former in the north would be met by corresponding activity on the part of Great Britain in the south. And by the south of Persia Lord Curzon meant the whole of the country south of a line drawn roughly west and east from Khanikin on the Turkish frontier, through Kermanshah, Hamadan, Ispahan, Yezd, Kerman and Nasratabad, to the Afghan frontier in Sistan.

He had been quick to grasp the immense strategic value of Sistan, situated as it was at a point on the glacis of the Indian fort where Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan met, midway between the frontier of Russia and the Indian Ocean. And when writing his book on Persia, he had closely questioned Sir F. Goldsmid on the advantages of bringing it into railway communication with India by means of a line from Quetta *via* Nushki across Baluchistan. On reaching India he had pushed on the establishment of a trade route along this line; had sanctioned the extension of the existing railway

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Percy, March 5th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>"Persia," Vol. II, page 465.

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

system from Quetta on the plateau to Nushki on the edge of the Baluchistan plain, and had appointed a consular representative in Sistan. "If Russia announced a line to Sistan," he told Lord Percy, "I would myself at once threaten the Shah with an occupation of Sistan ; and I would undertake to have my men there before Russia could get theirs."

Such being Lord Curzon's views on the Persian question, it is not surprising that he should have witnessed with a good deal of alarm, a growing activity on the part of other Powers in prosecuting their ambitions in this quarter of the globe. With the outbreak of the Transvaal war there had been a noticeable increase of activity on the part of both France and Russia. Thanks to the Viceroy's watchfulness and prompt action, the attempt of the former Power to obtain a naval base on the coast of Oman had been frustrated, and the long drawn negotiations which have been described in chapter IV ended in the acquisition by France of nothing more than a coal shed alongside of that of Great Britain at Muscat. There were, however, other ways in which she took a delight in adding to our embarrassments in these waters. The practice in which she had long indulged of granting her flag—and consequently her protection—to the sea-faring subjects of the Sultan of Oman, and so shielding those engaged in the arms traffic from search by British men-of-war, was now adopted on a huge scale, and was only finally brought to an end when it was submitted to the Hague tribunal and an award in favour of Great Britain given in 1904.

Signs of Russian activity were even more pronounced. A Russian subject, Count Kapnist, had obtained a concession for a railway which was to have its terminus at Koweit ; and Russian interest in this scheme had only waned when the arrangement with the Sheikh of Koweit referred to in chapter IV had been effected by Lord Curzon.

But Russian interest only died down in the neighbourhood of Koweit to reappear in regions nearer the Indian frontier. An attempt had been made in 1900 to establish a Russian coaling station at Bunder Abbas ; and during the same year a railway survey had been carried through from Ispahan to no less than four different termini on the Gulf, Mohammerah, Bushire, Bunder Abbas and

## CURZON, 1900-1904

Chahbar. These activities had been accompanied by an ostentatious display of interest. The Russian public had been prepared for a forward policy by inspired articles in the Russian press ; and in 1900 a Russian gunboat, the *Gilyak*, had made a tour of the Gulf and had penetrated up the Shat-el-Arab as far as Basrah. This display of force had been followed by others, the cruiser *Varyag* having visited Muscat, Bushire, Lingah, and Bunder Abbas in 1901, to be succeeded by the *Askold* and later on by yet another Russian cruiser, the *Boyarin*, accompanied by the French warship, *Infernet*, as a demonstration of the community of interest of the allies in Persian waters. Simultaneously, the Russian consular establishments had been increased throughout the regions adjoining the Gulf, Commercial Missions had made extensive tours of the country and a Steam Navigation and Trading Company subsidised by the Russian Government had been founded. And, in addition to these marked activities on the part of France and Russia, Turkish officials were taking an officious interest in territory belonging to the Sheikh of Koweit from a desire to further the avowed intention of Germany to secure a maritime terminus for the Baghdad railway.

Against all these attempted inroads upon Great Britain's historic position of ascendancy Lord Curzon had pitted a dogged resistance. Each fresh display of naval force by Russia had been met by a demonstration of superior strength by Great Britain. Surveys of the roadsteads, islands and inlets, that had not hitherto been accurately charted, were undertaken. A flotilla of gunboats for permanent service in the Gulf was put into commission ; her consular establishments were increased and their personnel and escorts strengthened ; additional telegraph cables were laid ; improved steamer and postal facilities were obtained in return for increased subsidies given by Lord Curzon's Government ; Russian loans to Persia were countered by similar advances arranged for by the Indian Government ; and two Commercial Missions, one under Mr. Maclean deputed by the Board of Trade in England in 1903, and the second under Mr. Gleadwe-Newcomen deputed by the Government of India in 1904, carried out exhaustive enquiries as to the most effective means of fostering British and Indian trade with Persia.

And, while Lord Curzon was countering each fresh move of his

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

opponents on the Persian chess board, he was assiduous in his appeals to the Government at home to adopt a more vigorous policy in the Middle East. He bombarded not only the Secretary of State for India but the Foreign Minister also with letters on the subject; and his Despatch of September 1899 having failed in its object, he returned to the charge in November 1901 with an exhaustive Minute, which he forwarded to the Secretary of State under cover of a letter from the Government of India. His importunity was great; but in the end it met with its reward. Lord Lansdowne, who had succeeded Lord Salisbury as Foreign Minister in November 1900, showed a greater readiness than his predecessor to assume responsibility for a more active policy. Early in 1902, he instructed the British Minister in Tehran to explain to the Persian Government that Great Britain would not tolerate any encroachments by Russia in southern Persia, and that, if in face of this warning the Shah's Government decided to encourage any extension of Russian political influence in that region, His Majesty's Government would feel obliged to reconsider their own policy, which had hitherto been directed exclusively to the maintenance of the national existence and territorial integrity of the country. This declaration he repeated to the Shah in person on the occasion of the latter's visit to London during the summer of the same year.

Publicity was given to this decision of the Government to take active steps to protect British interests in Persia by Lord Cranborne, now Marquess of Salisbury, then Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who stated in the House of Commons in 1902 that it would be impossible for the Government, whatever the cause, to abandon what they regarded as our rightful position either in the Persian Gulf, or in the southern provinces of Persia, or in those provinces which bordered on our Indian Empire. And in May of the following year this significant warning was repeated and emphasised by Lord Lansdowne himself, who took occasion to observe in the course of a discussion of the matter in the House of Lords, that His Majesty's Government would regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf as a very grave menace to British interests, which we should resist with all the means at our disposal.

Lord Curzon was elated—" You may judge how satisfied I was,"

## CURZON, 1903

he exclaimed in a letter to Lord George Hamilton on May the 14th, 1903, "when at length and for the first time I read the statement of a British Foreign Minister in Parliament, that Great Britain would in no circumstances tolerate the creation of a naval base by any foreign Power in the Persian Gulf. This is what I contended for in language which has since become famous in my book eleven years ago ; it is what I have argued and pleaded for in scores of letters to you during the last four years . . . and therefore if at the end of all these discussions I find that the view that I have so repeatedly pressed has at length prevailed in the highest quarters, I cannot help feeling - some personal sense of congratulation."

Here, then, at last was a perfectly unambiguous statement of the views entertained by the Government of Great Britain on a question of foreign policy which, under cover of their previous silence, had been giving rise to serious apprehensions. The Russian Ambassador in London, unused to such directness of speech by British statesmen on delicate subjects, not unnaturally took an early opportunity of broaching the matter. He did so, in fact, on the day following Lord Lansdowne's statement ; and in conversation with him he repudiated the idea that Russia had any intention of establishing a naval base in the Persian Gulf, or was in the least likely to construct any railway in eastern Persia which could be regarded as a menace to the Indian frontier. Replying, however, to the suggestion which Lord Lansdowne felt encouraged by this assertion tentatively to put forward —that the British and Russian Governments might explore the possibility of arriving at some understanding as to their respective interests in Persia—he expressed doubt if the time had come for any such general discussion, or for consideration of any Agreement under which the respective spheres of influence of the two countries would be formally recognised.

Lord Curzon, as we have seen, while admitting the advantages of such an Agreement with Russia, had never believed in its practicability. "You hit the nail on the head," he wrote, in a letter to Lord Selborne on May the 21st, 1903, "when you say that Russia has no conceivable advantage in making a settlement with us. The latter can only mean a surrender of a portion of her ambitions. I have pointed this out for years ; but an Agreement with Russia is one of

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

those sentimental hallucinations that it is impossible to remove from the British mind." And thankful that the Government had at last committed themselves openly to definite action, he cast about in his mind for some means of impressing the fact upon the minds of all concerned. He soon found what he sought in a suggestion which he had put forward once before, that he should himself make a tour of the Persian Gulf accompanied by a suitable naval escort.

As far back as 1901 Lord Curzon had spoken of this project as one that had long been hovering in his mind. A visit from the Viceroy of India in a man-of-war with a strong naval escort would create an impression of our interests and influence immeasurably greater, he pointed out, than any other plan that could be suggested. Neither the Russians nor the French could put anyone into the field who could for a moment compare with his prestige; "and if His Majesty's Government are resolved, as I believe them in the last resort to be, to pursue a policy of resolution and strength in the Persian Gulf, however far they may be prepared to yield on the mainland of Persia, I cannot imagine anything which would more clearly demonstrate to the public that intention than the step which I have indicated."<sup>1</sup> The proposal, when first put forward, had created some alarm in the minds of the Government at home. "... looking to the condition of affairs abroad just now, both the Prime Minister and Lansdowne think a visit by you to that part of the world would be inopportune and risky... We all feel that until we can emerge from the South African imbroglio we must keep quiet. Your views as regards the Persian Gulf are well known, and if in the autumn you were to pay your proposed visit, undoubtedly it would cause a great deal of excitement."<sup>2</sup>

The situation in 1903 differed materially from that in 1901, and the objections which had been raised in that year no longer applied. The South African war was over, and the Government had openly declared the application of a Munroe Doctrine to the Persian Gulf. Lord Curzon was convinced that his proposed cruise would be "the most public and unanswerable evidence of the sincerity of the Government in their declarations." Moreover, as the Government

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, May 22nd, 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the Secretary of State, June 21st, 1901.

## CURZON, 1903

of India had just made an advance of between £200,000 and £300,000 to the Persian Government on the security of the southern Persian customs, they had acquired an additional interest in these regions of a very special character. He added that he would feel deeply if he was thwarted in the execution of this project by any undue apprehensions at home.<sup>1</sup>

For once the Cabinet and Lord Curzon were found to be in agreement on a question of foreign policy, and the Viceroy's visit was sanctioned. On November the 16th he embarked on the R.I.M.S. *Hardinge* at Karachi, escorted, thanks to the appreciation of the importance of the occasion displayed by Lord Selborne, then First Lord of the Admiralty—by an imposing naval force. "Just a line," he wrote to the latter on the eve of his embarkation, "as I start for the Gulf, thanks to you, in almost swashbuckling style." The presence of the ships gave to the prestige of the Viceroy the spectacular reinforcement which appealed so directly to the oriental mind. "The small harbour," he wrote when describing his visit to Muscat, "with our big white ship and the *Lawrence* in the foreground, and behind them the dark hulls of no less than six British men-of-war, presented a spectacle such as the Muscatis can never before have witnessed."<sup>2</sup> And when the tour was over he wrote with enthusiasm of the help which he had received from Rear-Admiral G. Atkinson-Willes, the officer in command of his naval escort. "I found the admiral an alert, capable and agreeable man.—We spent a great deal of time together and investigated all the important points of naval and political strategy connected with the Gulf. We found ourselves in agreement in every particular; and our joint recommendations will be forwarded to His Majesty's Government."<sup>3</sup>

The outstanding result of a cruise, lasting exactly three weeks, was an appreciable strengthening of the ties between Great Britain and the various Chiefs of the Arabian littoral, and the complete restoration of the prestige of Great Britain throughout the Persian Gulf. As to this Lord Curzon entertained no doubt. He spoke of the demeanour of the Sultan of Oman as resembling that of a

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, June 17th, 1903.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 21st, 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Lord Selborne, December 21st, 1903.



THE PILOT ON BOARD FILM ARGONAUT AT SHIRGAM



## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

loyal feudatory of the British Crown, rather than of an independent Sovereign, and he was satisfied that the impression made upon the rulers and peoples of the Gulf was one of the incontestable predominance of British interests throughout those regions, and of the resolute intention of the British and Indian Governments to maintain them.

That the Viceroy's triumphal procession through the waters of the Gulf was viewed with some jealousy by the Persian Government was evident from the attitude of Ala-ed-Dowleh, the chief representative of the Shah in southern Persia, whose insistence on a procedure derogatory to the dignity of so highly placed a visitor led to Lord Curzon refusing to land at Bushire as he had originally intended doing. With the single exception of this episode no contretemps arose to mar the success of the proceedings.

The tour was, indeed, much more than a picturesque and isolated episode in the varied programme of inspection in which every Viceroy of India indulges. It was the crowning event of five years of strenuous and successful endeavour to maintain the position of Great Britain intact against the assaults of other Powers. Not all the measures taken by Lord Curzon to meet the menace with which he found himself confronted were yet completed ; some overlapped his visit and others were yet to come. But by the end of 1903, when the Viceroy sailed majestically into Persian waters, the crisis of the long-drawn struggle for the maintenance of that position of supremacy in the Gulf, which was vital to Great Britain's political and strategic needs, was over ; and with Lord Lansdowne's clear cut definition of British interests and his assertion of the Government's determination at all costs to uphold them, the efforts of other Powers were gradually relaxed.

Lord Curzon's investigation of the waterways of the Arabian and Persian coasts—especially of those in the neighbourhood of Koweit—in company with Admiral Atkinson-Willes, led to conclusions and recommendations of great value for the future ; and his discussion of many difficult and delicate questions concerning British policy in Persia with the British Minister, Sir Arthur Hardinge, who had come down from Tehran to join him, smoothed the way for more effectual co-operation between the Government

## CURZON, 1903

of India and the representative of the Foreign Office. But in other respects his tour of the Gulf set the seal upon victories already won, and the key-note of the numerous speeches which he delivered was set in a passage in his Address at the Durbar held for the Chiefs of the Arabian littoral at Shargah on November the 21st.

" We were here before any other Power in modern times had shown its face in these waters. We found strife and we have created order. It was our commerce as well as your security that was threatened and called for protection. At every port along this coast the subjects of the King of England still reside and trade. The great Empire of India which it is our duty to defend lies almost at your gates. We saved you from extinction at the hands of your neighbours. We opened these seas to the ships of all nations and enabled their flags to fly in peace. We have not seized or held your territory. We have not destroyed your independence, but have preserved it. We are not now going to throw away this century of costly and triumphant enterprise ; we shall not wipe out the most unselfish page in history. The peace of these waters must still be maintained ; your independence will continue to be upheld ; and the influence of the British Government must remain supreme."

These strenuous days of speech-making, inspection, investigation and discussion were not without their picturesque and humorous interludes. The scene on the quarter deck of the *Argonaut*, silhouetted against the fringe of palms which marked the coast of Oman at Muscat, was a dramatic one. Furnished with gorgeous Indian trappings brought for the purpose—a gold and silver throne and gold-embroidered carpets and hangings—with the nozzles of the great guns of the ship projecting in the background, it provided an appropriate setting for the Durbars, arranged first for the Sultan of Oman, and then, at Shargah, for the Trucial Chiefs, " bearded Old Testament figures in Arab costume." Lord Curzon's intercourse with the Sultan of Oman was not the least gratifying of many satisfactory episodes during the tour. When he had selected Major, afterwards Sir Percy, Cox to carry out his policy in the Gulf, he had given him detailed verbal instructions as

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

to his procedure. "I have had Cox up at Simla," he told the Secretary of State, "and have coached him carefully for Muskat. My advice has been summed up in this precept: make the Sultan understand that every consideration of policy, of prudence, of past experience, of future hopes compels him to be on our side—not necessarily against anybody else, but to recognise that his interests are bound up in loyalty to Great Britain."<sup>1</sup> Major Cox had succeeded beyond his highest expectations. At Muskat British prestige once more reigned supreme; and the Viceroy viewed with greater impatience than ever the rôle assumed by France on the strength of a technical equality with ourselves, which she derived from an ancient and obsolete treaty—"a solemn and exasperating farce,"—which had to be endured because the French possessed "a tattered piece of paper which it amuses them to flourish in our faces in order to vex us."<sup>2</sup> And he urged Lord Lansdowne to see that the question of Muskat was not forgotten in any arrangement which he contemplated with the Government of the French Republic.

At Bahrein his landing was less dignified than he could have wished, for, the water being shallow, he was faced with the alternative of being carried ashore, or of arriving on the back of a donkey without bridle or stirrup. But this was more than made up for by his entry into Koweit.

"When I landed at Koweit the Sheikh gave me a great reception. His forces, cavalry, camel-cavalry and foot, had been marshalled on the plain outside the town; the solitary vehicle of Koweit was pulled out for the accommodation of the Sheikh and myself—later in the day it was kicked to pieces by the two Arab horses who drew it and who were not accustomed to such employment; and surrounded by a shouting, galloping crowd, firing guns with ball cartridge into the air or onto the ground, and careering in every direction, we made our state entry into the town."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated September the 19th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, November 21st, 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1903.

The situation at Koweit had for long been an anomalous one. It was realised both in London and in Calcutta that it was important that no part of the territory under the jurisdiction of the Sheikh should pass under the control of any other Power; and under the secret Agreement concluded by Lord Curzon with Mubarak in February 1899, the latter had pledged himself neither to alienate any part of his territory nor to receive the representative of any foreign Power. The geographical conditions were such, however, as to give a special value to some part at least of Mubarak's territory, since it contained the one suitable stretch of deep water which was so necessary to the terminus of any railway constructed south from Baghdad in the direction of the Persian Gulf. And, with covetous eyes cast upon it in consequence, it became a question not so much of Mubarak's willingness as of his ability to exclude hostile influences from it. Lord Curzon had always been anxious to regularise the position by acceding to Mubarak's own request to be taken openly under the protection of Great Britain. His Majesty's Government, while prepared to assist the Sheikh to repel any actual attack upon his possessions, were not willing to face the difficulties with other Powers which they believed that the declaration of a formal protectorate would occasion. And in the late summer of 1901, as a result of discussions at Constantinople in which Germany participated on the side of Turkey, it was agreed that all concerned should maintain the *status quo*—whatever that comforting phrase, beloved by diplomats, might be held to mean. This solution of the difficulty met with little approval from Lord Curzon, who was scornful of what he regarded as a timid evasion of the realities of the case. "When you hear a Foreign Minister say anywhere that all he wants is to defend the *status quo*," he told Lord Percy, "you may guess in nine cases out of ten that he has no policy at all."<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, while Lord Curzon was putting forward proposals for definite action and the Cabinet were finding reasons for refusing to act on them, the problem was solving itself under the inexorable march of events. On more than one occasion British naval forces were obliged to come to the assistance of the Sheikh,

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated October the 1st, 1902.

## THE PERSIAN QUESTION

and, by the time of the Viceroy's visit, Mubarak, regarding hard facts as of more importance than diplomatic quibbles, described himself openly as an ally under the protection of Great Britain. He pointed out that he had rejected in turn the overtures of France and Russia and the threats and blandishments of Turkey; and, when he accepted from the Viceroy's hands the handsome sword which the latter had brought with him as a present, he asked that he might be given a belt also, so that he might buckle it on at once to show that he had become "a military officer of the British Government." By doing so he undoubtedly exhibited a truer appreciation of the facts of the situation than was shown by the inmates of more than one European Chancellory.

On December the 7th the *Hardinge* re-entered Karachi harbour after a cruise which was without a precedent and, except for a visit paid by Lord Hardinge of Penshurst to Basra in the special circumstances of the war, in February 1915, has never since been repeated. It was fitting that, as a demonstration of the influence and power of Great Britain in the East, it should have been carried through by the man who had been primarily responsible for maintaining them. For it was to Lord Curzon's foresight and insistence in face of little enough encouragement from home, that the Empire emerged from the crucial years of her entanglements in South Africa with her long arterial lines of communication with Australia and New Zealand, and India and the Far East, secured against the danger of a flank attack, and with her position of political ascendancy in Asia unimpaired.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

JANUARY 1904—OCTOBER 1905

By January 1904 Lord Curzon had been five years in India. On the 10th of that month Lady Curzon left Calcutta for England, travelling by sea *via* Colombo. But pending questions to which the Viceroy attached great importance had decided him to postpone his own departure until the end of April. Such partings never lost their poignancy. "I watched your carriage lights as far as I could see them flitting between the Botanical trees," she wrote after he had left her on board the boat a little way down the Hughli river. "And then despair settled down on me with the evening mist and there was nothing to do but to put my wet face to bed." Lord Curzon returned with a heavy heart to the great room in Government House in which he spent so many hours out of every twenty-four. "Life has gone silently grindingly on since you left," he wrote on January the 12th. "I felt very miserable driving back to Calcutta after we had left you. . . Now you are slipping away down the Bay of Bengal further and further every minute." Time did little to assuage the pangs of solitude. "And now my feeble gossip comes to a close," he wrote on February the 11th, "for you are at the end where are life and interest and I where are only bitterness and fatigue."

Among the questions upon which Lord Curzon was now engaged was one which was destined to give rise to serious trouble. In April 1902, when writing to Lord George Hamilton on the subject of Berar which he contemplated placing under the Adminis-

## THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

tration of the Central Provinces, he had mentioned his intention of looking into the question of provincial boundaries generally. "Bengal," he wrote, "is unquestionably too large a charge for any single man." By a curious coincidence the question of certain readjustments of Provincial boundaries had for many months past been the subject of discussion—unknown to the Viceroy—in a departmental file which reached his table a few days after his letter to Lord George Hamilton. That discussion of such a subject should have been in progress for so long a time without his being informed of it was an outrage on his sense of what was due to the Head of the Administration. "I really feel disposed to ask," he noted on the file, "Is there no such thing as a Head of the Government, and what are secretaries for but to keep him acquainted with the administration?" He went on to say that he did not suppose for a moment that the omission to inform him of the discussions which had been in progress was a conscious one. But the whole thing provided an admirable illustration of what departmentalism was capable of. "People sometimes ask what departmentalism is," he continued. "To any such I give this case as an illustration. Departmentalism is not a moral delinquency. It is an intellectual hiatus—the complete absence of thought or apprehension of anything outside the purely departmental aspects of the matter under discussion. For fourteen months it never occurred to a single human being in the Departments to mention the matter or to suggest that it should be mentioned. Round and round like the diurnal revolution of the earth went the file, stately, solemn, sure and slow; and now in due season it has completed its orbit and I am invited to register the concluding stage."<sup>1</sup> Lord Curzon was by no means prepared to register the concluding stage, and he sent the file back whence it had come, with an intimation that the approaching incorporation of Berar into British India provided an occasion for a more general consideration of existing boundaries.

His own view was that the existing boundaries of Bengal, Assam, the Central Provinces and Madras were "antiquated, illogical and

<sup>1</sup>The note is given *in extenso* in Mr. Lovat Fraser's "India under Curzon and After."

## CURZON, 1904

productive of inefficiency"; and he set to work to plan necessary alterations. "I should like to fix the Provincial boundaries for the next generation," he told Sir A. Godley.

The plan put forward in due course for reducing the unwieldy dimensions of Bengal, was interpreted by the intelligentsia of the Province as a subtle attack upon the growing solidarity of Bengali nationalism, and at once produced an outcry. The agitation which arose was not altogether disinterested. The Calcutta bar, the most numerous and powerful in India, had visions of a separate High Court coming into existence to serve the populous districts of the proposed new Province, to their own material and political disadvantage. The politicians who controlled the native newspapers of Calcutta were equally alive to the probable curtailment of their own activities and influence in the event of other newspapers springing to life in the capital of a new Administration. But it was sentiment that gave the movement the force which it ultimately acquired.

With his usual industry Lord Curzon studied the criticisms levelled against the scheme; but, if he hoped to find among them tempered and well considered arguments, he was disappointed. "So far, in the hundreds of articles and letters that I have read upon the subject, at any rate of the partition of Eastern Bengal, I have not found one single line of argument; there is nothing but rhetoric and declamation." Nevertheless he had no wish to act precipitately. "The scheme itself is by no means cut and dried," he wrote a little later. "Opinions differ very widely about it. We are ourselves open to any reasonable argument, and I have very little doubt, before its final submission to you, that it will have been subjected to substantial modifications."

He was unfortunate in finding in Calcutta a unanimously hostile press. His popularity with the non-official European population had undergone a temporary eclipse on account of a case known as the Bain case, which had acquired an acute if ephemeral notoriety a short time before. Mr. Bain, the manager of a tea plantation in Assam, had been convicted of a minor offence—that of a simple hurt—against a tea garden coolie and had been sentenced to six months simple imprisonment. Since the coolie had died of the

## THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

injuries that he had received, the Government of Assam had brought the case to the notice of the Home Department of the Government of India ; and that Department, acting on the advice of the Law Officers of the Crown in Calcutta, had appealed to the High Court against the inadequacy of the verdict and consequent sentence. The appeal had failed, and the Government had been roundly denounced in the English owned press for attempting to tamper with justice in the interests of the native population. Indeed, people spoke of the racial feeling which had been aroused as exceeding anything that had been known since the Ilbert Bill, in the chequered days of Lord Ripon. And so dominant a figure had the Viceroy become that, in the minds of nine people out of ten in India, the Viceroy was the Government. " You have perhaps ascertained," he wrote about this time, " that a sparrow can hardly twitter its tail without the action being attributed to direct orders issued by the present Viceroy." And it was the Viceroy, consequently, whose participation in the matter, had, as a matter of fact, been confined to writing " I agree " at the foot of the proposals put up to him by the Home Department, who incurred the odium arising out of the case.

For very different reasons, therefore, public opinion both Indian and European was prejudiced against this fresh illustration of the Viceroy's reforming zeal.

It was not Lord Curzon's way, however, to be deterred from prosecuting a reform which he believed to be salutary, by opposition which he regarded as factious or ill-founded. And he decided to visit the scene of the trouble itself, both to study on the spot the case for change and to reply to the criticisms of those who opposed it. " I leave for Chittagong on February the 13th," he wrote in a letter to Lady Curzon, " thence to Dacca and Mymensingh and shall be back here on February the 28th. The row about the dismemberment of Eastern Bengal continues in every accent of agony and denunciation. But so far no argument." On arrival he found ample scope for his activity. " I have had a very busy week since I last wrote," he observed in a letter to Lord George Hamilton, written from an Eastern Bengal district, " including some half a dozen speeches. In two of them I explained and defended the

## CURZON, 1904

proposed partition of Bengal and answered the ignorant criticisms that have been levelled against it."

His investigations satisfied him that the case for change in the direction which he advocated was even stronger than he had imagined. "I have little doubt from all that I have seen and heard in the regions affected that the project must be expanded somewhat, so as to carve a new Province out of Eastern Bengal to which Assam will be appended." The further he got from the capital the more attenuated did he find the administrative net. In the whole of the huge district of Mymensingh, with a population of 4,000,000, he found only one English Executive Officer. Moreover the Lieutenant Governor with his Head-quarters at Calcutta and Darjeeling, both far removed from the populous eastern districts with their own peculiar problems, could not possibly be expected to rule efficiently so vast an area. There were many even among the opponents of the scheme who were quite prepared to subscribe to this latter contention; but their remedy was a different one, and one to which Lord Curzon was resolutely opposed. They would substitute for the Lieutenant Governor of the Province a Governor with an Executive Council as in Madras and Bombay. A Viceroy who had long since urged—though without success—the reduction of Madras and Bombay to the status of the other Provinces was hardly likely to smile on any such proposal.

"Government by one man is infinitely better than Government by three men if it can be so managed. What we want in India is personal knowledge of localities and personal touch with the people. This can only be gained by the familiarity of the Head of the Administration with the places and people under his charge. With a triumvirate as a ruling power this is quite impossible, and Bombay and Madras are both, in my view, illustrations that the weak points are in excess of the merits of the system."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Curzon's speeches were models of closely reasoned argument. He tore the many ignorant objections brought forward by the opponents of the scheme to tatters; but his Addresses were con-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, January 28th, 1904.

## THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

ciliatory in tone, and serious arguments against the details of the scheme received his careful consideration. It was in the course of his tour that he realised that at least one plausible ground of opposition to the project could be removed by enlarging its scope—by increasing the amount of territory to be severed from Bengal, and thus creating a new Province, of sufficient size and importance to form a Lieutenant Governorship with a Legislative Council of its own. He perceived that opposition to the project, as originally devised, of handing over one or two of the districts of Bengal to swell the charge of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, was not without considerable force ; and, in reply to the Addresses which he received, he made it clear that he was not unwilling to consider the larger scheme to which he made tentative allusions. He certainly believed that, as a result of his handling of the matter, the opponents of the scheme were silenced and the case for change was won. “ So far as I can yet judge,” he wrote on February the 22nd, “ my speeches seem simply to have dumbfounded the opponents. The Native papers are knocked silly and are left gasping, for I showed that all the wild things that they said would ensue are pure fabrications. As for the Calcutta English newspapers, they also do not know what to do or say.”<sup>1</sup> And he believed that the agitation would end in the Government case “ being established with no great difficulty and with general consent.”<sup>2</sup> This optimistic forecast was doomed to disappointment. If it had been merely a question of administrative efficiency, Lord Curzon’s belief would have proved to be well founded. Judged by this test, his case was an overwhelming one ; and when twelve months later he forwarded his proposals in their final shape for the consideration of the Secretary of State, he was able to claim for them that they were supported by “ an almost unparalleled unanimity of opinion ” on the part of all the officers consulted, as against an opposition inspired by purely political motives and directed to a purely political end.

Yet his speeches in Eastern Bengal in 1904, for all the felicity of their phrasing and for all the cogency of their reasoning, struck no responsive chord in the audiences to which they were addressed,

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, February 22nd, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CURZON, 1904

for the simple reason that those who provided the driving force behind the storm and tumult that had been raised, cared not one jot for the logic of the case, but were prepared to fight—illogically, perhaps, but none the less passionately—for things which they prized far above administrative convenience or the reasoned arguments by which the case for change was backed. Bengal, in fact, was passing through one of those storms of unreasoning passion which were ever liable to sweep its emotional people off their feet. Their nerves were thrumming like the strings of a giant harp to the magic touch of the very sentiment which Lord Curzon was inclined too lightly to brush aside.

His attitude of almost contemptuous indifference toward the agitation which his proposals had aroused would, indeed, have been easier to understand had it not been for the fact that in his fervent championship of Indian interests, when these were found to be in conflict with the interests of Great Britain—the question of payment for the Indian delegation at the Coronation of the King in London is but one of many similar examples—he had laid ever increasing stress upon the growth of public opinion in India and the folly of ignoring it. So strongly had he pressed this point in recent controversies, that Sir A. Godley had commented somewhat pointedly, in a letter written early in the year, upon the deference which the Viceroy expected the Government at home to pay to Indian agitation. He could not quite understand, he said, “why what is called public opinion in India should have any more overwhelming weight either with Your Excellency’s Government or with the Secretary of State than it had ten or fifteen years ago.” Lord Curzon had been quick to reply.

“To you in England it seems so clear that there is no difference between the end of Lord Dufferin’s regime and the end of mine. To me in India it is transparent that there is all the difference in the world. What is the great difference at this end? It is that public opinion has been growing all the while, is articulate, is daily becoming more powerful, cannot be ignored. What is the origin of mistakes sometimes made at the other end? It is that men are standing still with their eyes shut and do not see the movement here.”

## THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

Let there be no mistake, public opinion in India was no figment of his imagination, it was a reality and

“ . . . . to contend that it does not exist, that it has not advanced in the last fifteen years, or that it may be treated with general indifference is, in my view, to ignore the great change which is passing over this country, and which I believe history will recognise myself as having done much (whether wisely or unwisely) to accelerate ; viz. the lifting of India from the level of a Dependency to the position which is bound one day to be hers, if it is not so already, namely, that of the greatest partner in the Empire.”<sup>1</sup>

One may hazard the opinion that those who professed to give expression to public opinion in India would fairly have rubbed their eyes had they chanced to fall upon sentiments so irreproachable coming from such a source. They would have doubted if they themselves could have put their case more cogently. Yet, when there arose in Bengal an outcry such as had seldom before been heard, a tumult whose repercussions reverberated through the land long after Lord Curzon himself had left its shores—an arresting symptom, surely, of that movement of which the Viceroy claimed to be aware, but to which he charged those in England with being blind—he appeared strangely insensible to its immense significance. “ The united voice of the whole nation,” declared an Indian writer at a later date, “ rose and fell like one crying in the wilderness. None heeded it. The Viceroy persevered in his scheme of administrative division ; and the English Parliament pronounced its benediction upon it. The political method of the Congress (i.e. constitutional agitation) had been tried and failed—and the people fell upon bitterness.”<sup>2</sup> How is such apparent inconsistency to be explained ?

The fact of the matter is that Lord Curzon reserved to himself

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir A. Godley, dated January 27th, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. B. C. Chatterjee ; see “ The Heart of Aryavarta,” p. 88. The statement quoted is an exaggeration ; the Moslem population of Eastern Bengal stood to gain appreciably by the partition and the agitation was essentially Hindu in origin. But to its strength and persistence the history of subsequent years bears witness.

the right to decide when public opinion was an expression of views based on sober reasoning and supported by obvious justice, and when it was a mere frothy ebullition of irrational sentiment. In his championship of Indian interests against what he regarded as the exactions of the Secretary of State he pictured himself a modern Joshua leading the peoples committed to his charge along their divinely appointed way and protecting them against exploitation by a tyrannous and selfish world. In a letter to the Secretary of State he declared that in every case of divergent interest between India and Great Britain which he had been called upon to examine, it was his conviction that justice was on the side of India. That was the criterion which he applied to all his judgments—the justice of the case. In the matter in question he had satisfied himself that the interests of the vast, inarticulate masses of the people were suffering ; and it was in justice to them that a rearrangement of the administrative boundaries was demanded. “Efficiency of administration,” he declared in a speech on the Budget a few weeks later, “is, in my view, a synonym for the contentment of the governed. It is the one means of affecting the people in their homes and of adding only an atom perhaps, but still an atom to the happiness of the masses.” Against this requirement an agitation based on sentiment could not for a moment be permitted to prevail. In the same letter in which he had urged upon Sir A. Godley the importance of recognising the existence of a public opinion in India he had guarded himself against a possible supposition that he was arguing that it must always be deferred to. “I do not, therefore, argue that public opinion here is to be kowtowed to. No one has more consistently defied it in some matters than I.” And for the reasons given above he had no hesitation in defying it now.

Even so, it is probable that he under-estimated the magnitude of the change in the outlook of the Indian educated classes, which for some time past had been taking place almost unobserved ; but which was to be brought dramatically to light, before many days had passed by the victories of an Eastern people—the Japanese—over the vaunted might of the military Colossus of the West. And he returned to Calcutta from his tour of the Eastern Bengal districts, well satisfied with its results and with his mind made up with

## THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

regard to the main lines on which a revised project should be shaped.

It may be convenient to anticipate a little the course of events in connection with the scheme. His final suggestions were not submitted to the Secretary of State until after his return from leave in England, in February 1905. Under the shape which they had then assumed, an entirely new Province was to be formed by uniting the districts of Eastern and Northern Bengal with Assam. This new territory with its capital at Dacca was to comprise an area of 106,500 square miles, with a population of thirty-one millions, of which eighteen millions would be Muhammadans and twelve millions Hindus. It was to be made the charge of a Lieutenant Governor and to be endowed with its own Board of Revenue and Legislative Council. In judicial matters it was to remain under the jurisdiction of the High Court of Calcutta. The scheme, with few alterations, received the sanction of the Secretary of State in June ; the formation of the new Province was notified by Proclamation in September ; the necessary legislation was passed on the 29th day of the same month, and in October the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam came formally into being.

## CHAPTER XXV

### ANCIENT MONUMENTS

MARCH 1904

WHEN Lord Curzon returned to Calcutta at the end of February 1904 the Legislative Session was in full swing. It was the busiest that he had known. It included the fiercely contested Universities Bill, another equally contentious measure, the Official Secrets Bill, the Co-operative Credit Societies Bill, and the Ancient Monuments Preservation Bill. "You can hardly realise," he wrote at the end of an exhausting day, "the lassitude induced by a prolonged sitting in this climate." The mental strain was great, for it fell to the Viceroy to sum up every debate; and, since it was to his speeches that the public invariably turned for an authoritative summary of the proceedings, the task was no perfunctory one, but one which called for extreme care both in argument and expression.

Of all the legislation passed during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty, none gave him quite the same intimate personal satisfaction as the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act. It placed the official seal upon five years of labour which the historian of some future time will surely describe as his most enduring work in India. Writing from Agra in January 1903, Lord Elcho had said—"If you never did anything else you would have earned the undying gratitude of the world for what you have done for this place." And Lord Curzon himself was justifiably proud of the results of his labours. "We are doing splendid work in restoration and conservation now throughout India," he told the Secretary of State. "And I really think that almost the most lasting external effect of my term of

office will be the condition in which I shall leave the priceless treasures of architecture and art which we possess in this country." His work in this direction was inspired by his love of beauty, a pious reverence for all that bore witness to the creative genius of perished peoples and that delight in breathing the breath of life into the dry bones of bygone days which has more than once been referred to in these pages. "Much of ancient history," he declared in an Address to members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, "even in an age of great discoveries, still remains mere guesswork. But the clues are lying everywhere at our hand, in buried cities, in undeciphered inscriptions, in casual coins, in crumbling pillars and pencilled slabs of stone. They supply the data by which we may reconstruct the annals of the past and recall to life the morality, the literature, the politics, the art of a perished age."<sup>1</sup>

With fine scorn he brushed aside the specious argument that it was no duty of a Christian Government to preserve the monuments of a pagan art or the sanctuaries of an alien faith. Art and beauty and the reverence that was owing to all that had evoked human genius, or had inspired human faith, were independent of particular creeds, and, in so far as they touched religion, were embraced by the common religion of all mankind. There was no principle of artistic discrimination between the mausoleum of the despot and the sepulchre of the saint. That which was beautiful, that which was historic, that which tore the mask off the face of the past and helped mankind to read its riddles—these and not the dogmas of a combative theology were the criteria by which they should be guided.

To the pioneers in the field of Indian archaeological research Lord Curzon gave full credit, and especially to Sir A. Cunningham and James Fergusson, whose books "sound one unending note of passionate protest against the barrack builder and the military engineer." But the work was too great for individual exertion and much of it remained desultory, fragmentary and incomplete. And he made it clear at the very beginning of his term of office that the task of exploring, preserving, and, where necessary, restoring the architectural heritage of India, was one which he

<sup>1</sup>Speech delivered on February 7th, 1900.

## CURZON, 1904

unhesitatingly accepted as an obligation on behalf of the Government of the land. The obligation was one, indeed, which had been admitted since Lord Canning had constituted the archaeological survey of Northern India in 1860. But it was an obligation which had hitherto been discharged intermittently and with hesitation. "I hope to assert more definitely during my time," he told the members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in February 1900, "the Imperial responsibility of Government in respect of Indian antiquities, to inaugurate or persuade a more liberal attitude on the part of those with whom it rests to provide the means, and to be a faithful guardian of the priceless treasure house of art and learning that has, for a few years at any rate, been committed to my charge."

Time proved how faithful he had remained to this ambition. When he reached India the total expenditure by the Imperial and Provincial Governments amounted to £7,000 a year. By 1904 this figure had mounted to £37,000, and before he finally left India it had touched an even higher level.

The assiduity with which he visited and issued orders in respect of the great remains with which the whole continent was studded has been referred to in the course of the accounts which have been given in these pages of his various tours. "As a pilgrim at the shrine of beauty I have visited them," he declared when commending the Ancient Monuments Bill to the favourable consideration of the Legislative Council, "but as a priest in the temple of duty have I charged myself with their reverent custody and their studious repair."

He had paid the most recent of his many visits to Agra on his way back to Calcutta from his tour of the Persian Gulf in December 1903, and had written with legitimate pride of the outcome of his labours there. He did not think that it was too much to claim for it that it was now the most beautifully kept and preserved as well as the most beautiful collection of ancient buildings in the world. And, as his biographer, I may, perhaps, be permitted to add that, having myself seen the famous Moghul buildings both before the inauguration of Lord Curzon's work and after its completion, I have no hesitation in endorsing to the full the claim which he himself made for it. "If you went back there you would hardly

## ANCIENT MONUMENTS

recognise the place," he told St. John Brodrick. "What were then dusty wastes are now green parks and gardens; neglected and half-tumbled down ruins are as perfect as on the day when they first left the builder's or mason's hand; we have trained our artificers to such a pitch that now at last they can faithfully reproduce the original work in marble, sandstone and *pietra dura*; and we have in fact carried through a work that will always redound to the credit of the British name."<sup>1</sup> He regarded every penny of the sum approaching £50,000, which during his Viceroyalty had been spent upon repairs at Agra alone, as "an offering of reverence to the past and a gift of recovered beauty to the future," and he did not believe that there was a taxpayer in the country who would grudge one anna of the outlay.

No detail of the work of restoration was too small to excite his personal intervention. "I was talking last night to a competent authority who had just been visiting Agra," he observed in a letter to Sir James La Touche, then Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces. "He told me that the custodians of the tomb at the Taj still wear very dingy garments—he thought that they should wear the traditional garb of the Moghul days—and, what is worse, that they still carry those abominable lamps. Do you remember that once when we were there together I drew attention to these and orders were given that a new design was to be prepared? Nothing has apparently been done."<sup>2</sup> A little later he decided that he would himself select and present a hanging lamp worthy of the building, and on April the 19th, 1905, he sought the assistance of Lord Cromer.

"I want to give a beautiful silver hanging lamp of Saracenic design to be hung above the cenotaphs of Shah Jahan and his queen in the upper mausoleum of the Taj—I have been trying for years to get the people here to give me a design, but have failed. I turn, therefore, to Cairo, where my recollection is that some very beautiful lamps still hang in the Arab mosques."

For six months he carried on a correspondence with Lord Cromer and other authorities in Egypt, and, failing to obtain what he wanted

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated December 17th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated January 28th, 1905.

by this means, he decided to visit Cairo on his way home in order to see to the matter himself. This he did at the end of the following November, and there now hangs from the centre of the great dome of the building the beautiful lamp which he was at last successful in securing. How many of those who gaze curiously at the lamp to-day pause to recall the years of patient search, the amount of pious thought and the load of personal labour which Lord Curzon devoted to its acquisition? The story deserves to be recorded, if only as a tribute to the admiration of a great Englishman for the historic greatness of Moghul India and to his sympathy with the living sentiments of the Muhammadan subjects of the British Crown.

The model which Lord Curzon sought was hard to find. As a result of the enquiries which he made in Cairo, his decision was finally cast in favour of a lamp which was known to have hung in the mosque of Sultan Beybars II. The lamp itself had vanished and neither in the museums of Cairo, Paris nor London could the famous original be found. It had probably passed into some private collection where it was lost to the generality of mankind. Fortunately its features down to the minutest detail were well known; and having come to his decision Lord Curzon sought the advice of two expert counsellors, Herz Bey, Director of the Arab Museum at Cairo, and Mr. E. Richmond, of the Egyptian Public Works Department, as to the best means of giving effect to it. It appeared that there were but two men in the whole of Egypt who were considered capable of carrying out a work of so much delicacy. Choice fell upon Todros Badir, who, at the end of two years labour, produced a lamp in bronze, inlaid throughout with silver and gold, such as had not been seen since the period of the original many centuries before. It was typical of Lord Curzon's minute attention to detail that during this time he should have caused the inscription with which he desired to commemorate his gift—"Presented to the Tomb of Mumtaz Mahal by Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, 1906"—to be translated into Persian, converted by a calligraphist at Agra into one of the scripts employed on the tombs of Shah Jahan and his queen, returned to Cairo for such revision as might be necessary to bring it into harmony with the

## ANCIENT MONUMENTS

style of the lamp and finally cut in a belt of pierced metal round its circumference.

The scene on the occasion of its installation by Sir John Hewett, Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces and a former colleague of Lord Curzon, was one which would have made a powerful appeal to Lord Curzon's ingrained love of romance. At sunset on February the 16th, 1908, evening prayer was intoned by the Imam in the mosque of the Taj in the presence of a vast congregation. Thereafter a gathering of two hundred of its leading members assembled in the tomb, the remainder to the number of 10,000 halting in the grounds outside the central building. The President of the Anjuman Islamia, Syed Ali Nabi, speaking to those present in Urdu, reminded them of the debt of gratitude which they owed to Lord Curzon for the restoration of their historic monuments—

“The Taj Mahal is for us the perfection of Moslem artistic endeavour and the embodiment of all that was best in the lives and thoughts of the Moghuls. It is with feelings of intense gratification, therefore, that we have watched this cherished mausoleum rescued from neglect and decay, that we have seen the tomb, the mosque and the many other structures grouped around it all tenderly and reverently repaired, the gardens assuming once more their ancient charm, and the arcaded courts and approaches restored to their former majesty.”

Of the lamp itself he said—

“As it hangs here above the graves of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, it revives in spirit, if not in precise detail, a ceremony performed in the old days, of lighting up the tomb once a year at the anniversary festival held in the Emperor's honour. The gift, therefore, could not appeal more strongly to our sentiment and imagination, for this pious usage of honouring the Imperial dead had disappeared perforce with the passing of the Moghul power and the spoliation of the building at the hands of invaders.”

When responding to the Syed's invitation to him to unveil the lamp, Sir John Hewett read an extract from the letter in

which Lord Curzon had requested him to arrange for its installation.

"—in asking you to see to its final installation, I would beg that it may be carefully guarded by the custodians of the shrine and may hang there as my last tribute of respect to the glories of Agra which float like a vision of eternal beauty in my memory and to the grave and potent religion which is professed by so many millions of our fellow subjects in India."

Some time before he had made a gift of a somewhat similar character to the famous Golden Temple at Amritsar. Noticing, when visiting the shrine in 1900, a clock of poor design hanging on the wall of the building, he had at once offered to replace it with one more in keeping with its surroundings. Two years later a clock in a case of chiselled and gilded brass, executed, according to a design supplied by Lord Curzon himself, by one of the foremost firms in England, was presented on his behalf to the authorities of the temple.

Agra was the scene of one of the first and certainly the best known of the great works of conservation and restoration to which Lord Curzon can lay claim. Its gleaming buildings of white marble and red sandstone possessed an extraordinary fascination for him, and he returned again and again to gaze with an ever increasing wonder upon their pillared halls and clustering domes. "The central dome of the Taj is rising like some vast exhalation into the air," he wrote in a letter to Lady Curzon in the spring of 1905, "and on the other side the red ramparts of the Fort stand like a crimson barricade against the sky. . . . If I had never done anything else in India, I have written my name here, and the letters are a living joy." But he did not allow his love of Agra to divert his reverent care from other sites of almost equal interest, and before he left India he was able to say that at all the great centres of architecture in the Indo-Saracenic style, he had, wherever it was possible, "recovered and renovated the dwellings in life and the resting places in death of those master builders the Mussulman Emperors and Kings." Things did not always go smoothly, and sometimes his plans miscarried, owing to the incompetence or the indifference of a subordinate. There were still some important things to be

## ANCIENT MONUMENTS

done even in the case of the best known of the Moghul buildings, he told Lady Curzon in April 1905. " You remember Humayun's tomb ? I had the garden restored, the water channels dug out and refilled and the whole place restored to its pristine beauty. I went to England last summer and, the eye of the master being away, the whole place has been allowed to revert. The garden has been let to a native and is now planted with turnips and the work of four years is thrown away ! I shall drive out there, and woe betide the Deputy Commissioner whose apathy has been responsible."

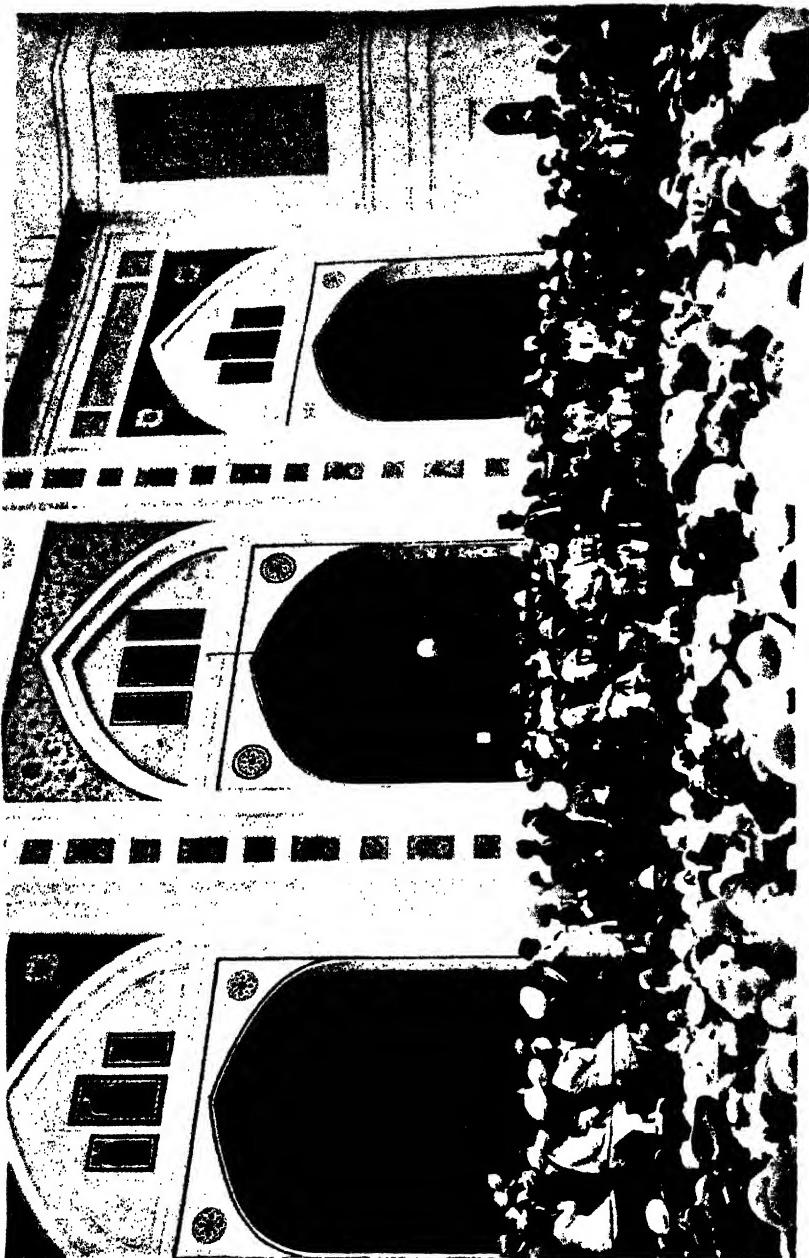
He had always been greatly attracted by Moslem architecture from the day when the domes and minarets of the Arab builders had first burst upon his gaze in Egypt. But he was not indifferent to the merits of other Eastern types, and his patronage was given with superb impartiality to the secular and religious handiwork of every race and every creed. At Bodh-Gaya he found the famous Buddhist shrine built by Buddhists in commemoration of one of the most sacred incidents in the life of their Master, and treated as the object of Buddhist pilgrimage from all parts of the Eastern world with but few interruptions for a period of 2,000 years, now in the hands of a Hindu *mabant*. That certain rights of possession and control had been granted to a Hindu by a Moghul Sovereign two centuries before was not disputed. That such rights of possession had, only in comparatively recent times, been so exercised as to convert a Buddhist shrine into a Hindu place of worship, was equally admitted, and Lord Curzon set to work to endeavour to effect an agreement under which the central shrine at least should be restored to the worship of those to whom in equity, if not in actual law, it undoubtedly belonged. On January the 16th, 1903, he drew up a long Memorandum in which he traced the history of the question, narrated all that passed between himself and the *mabant* on the occasion of his visit to the spot, and sketched the lines on which he hoped that a satisfactory settlement might be arranged. And from this time onwards until his own departure from India in the autumn of 1905, he persisted in his attempts to bring the matter to a satisfactory issue. That he failed in his main object was due to circumstances which he was powerless to control. His efforts were not, however, altogether fruitless. When visiting

the *mabants*' own residence he had at once detected, serving as supports to an arcade in the interior of the building, 32 Asoka pillars which were missing from the historic railing round the temple. Protracted negotiations resulted in the eventual restoration of these pillars to their proper site and setting.

In cases in which Lord Curzon wielded authority over the casual occupants of religious and historic buildings he exercised it to the full. But it is doubtful if anyone of a less forceful personality—even though he were Viceroy of India—would have succeeded in dislodging from such buildings all over India the various intruders who had long since converted them to their use. "At Ahmedabad," he told the members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, "I found the mosque of Sidi-Sayid, the pierced stone lattice-work of whose demi-lune windows is one of the glories of India, used as a *tehsildar's kutcherry*, and disfigured with plaster partitions and the omniverous whitewash. I hope," he added modestly, "to effect the reconversion of this building." From one end of India to the other, soldiers, civilians and ministers of the church, wherever they had obtained a footing in any building of antiquarian interest, were ruthlessly expelled—a Traffic Superintendent of the North Western Railway from the lovely tiled Dai Anga Mosque at Lahore ; Christian congregations from the Choti Khwabgah and from the fort in the same city, and from the Palace of King Mindon at Mandalay ; a club and a post-office from the same building ; a Police Instructor from a mosque in the famous fort at Vellore in Southern India ; a dak bungalow and a post-office from mosques at Bijapur ; a dispensary from a similar building at Lucknow, and a resident official from the marble pavilions on the Ana Sagar Lake at Ajmer.

Lord Curzon was equally solicitous for the art industries and handicrafts of India. During 1902 he had sent Mr., afterwards Sir G., Watt and Mr. Percy Brown, who subsequently became Principal of the School of Art at Calcutta, scouring the country, selecting and collecting specimens of such work as was still to be found representative of the ideas, the traditions, the instincts and the beliefs of the Indian peoples, in order that at Delhi, where would be assembled for the great Durbar the greatest possible number of people, he might provide an object lesson for those who believed





LORD CURZON OPENING THE ARTS EXHIBITION AT DELHI

## ANCIENT MONUMENTS

that among India's workmen the old artistic sense was dead. "What I desired," he declared, when opening the collection, "was an exhibition of all that is rare, characteristic, or beautiful in Indian art, our gold and silver ware, our metal work and enamels and jewellery, in carving our wood and ivory and stone, our best pottery and tiles, our carpets of old oriental patterns, our muslins and silks and embroideries, and the incomparable Indian brocades."

He was certainly successful in arousing a healthy interest in the still vital capacities of Indian art. During the brief period of the exhibition, 48,000 people paid for admission; the cash sales amounted to over three lakhs of rupees, and the total receipts to more than four lakhs. A large number of beautiful objects found their way from the exhibition into museums and private collections throughout the country, there to serve as silent but eloquent witnesses to the still unexhausted skill of the craftsman and artisan.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE SUMMER OF 1904

APRIL—DECEMBER 1904

ON April the 30th, 1904, Lord Curzon sailed for England, leaving Lord Ampthill in charge as Viceroy pending his own return. Shortly before leaving he had been offered, and had accepted, the Lord Wardenship of the Cinque Ports—a distinction which wore an additional glamour in his eyes in that it had been conferred upon Lord Dalhousie in very similar circumstances half a century before, and had last been held by his old Chief, Lord Salisbury. The romance of it appealed as strongly to Lady Curzon. “I spent such a happy afternoon in the darling old castle,” she wrote on the day on which she inspected it before Lord Curzon’s return, “I *simply loved it*. I never dreamed it was so pretty and fascinating. How George and I will adore it.”<sup>1</sup> She furnished Lord Curzon with a long description of her first visit of exploration. She told him how she gazed at Wellington’s wash-basin and his boots, “the former very small and the latter very big”; how she hid from the garrulous caretaker “in the corner where Pitt said farewell to Nelson,” and then crept out on to the ramparts and dragged a chair marked “heirloom” out, to sit in as she “watched the channel fleet do foolish manœuvres in the deep blue sea,” and later rested in the garden and watched the young thrushes hobble about and chirp. “I was so happy about that dear old house, and we shall be happy there—and Oh! what peace.”

But there were difficulties. The sanitary engineer called in to

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Hon. F. N. Curzon, April 27th, 1904.

## THE SUMMER OF 1904

make an inspection, gave an adverse report, and a second opinion given by an officer of the Royal Engineers was even more emphatic—no one could safely take up his residence there until there had been a drastic overhauling of the drains. Her plan of conducting Lord Curzon straight from Dover to Walmer Castle consequently fell through. But she was successful in finding a house near by, which she was able to take until such time as the castle had been got ready for occupation.

The period of peace and recuperation to which Lady Curzon looked forward, and of which Lord Curzon himself was in such urgent need, was not to be. There were functions to be attended—the Presentation of the Freedom of the City of London and a luncheon at the Mansion House; the conferring of an Honorary Degree at Oxford, and the Presentation of the Freedom of the Borough of Derby—all of which entailed important speeches. The gathering of those who were to receive Honorary Degrees at Oxford on June the 23rd was a distinguished one, including M. Paul Cambon the French Ambassador, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker of the House of Commons, George Wyndham and H. Asquith. Lord Curzon received an ovation and it was remarked in *The Times* of the following day, that of the receptions “the best of all was that accorded to Lord Curzon, sufficiently recovered to be present, though he had to use a stick in walking.”

At the Guildhall and elsewhere Lord Curzon spoke of Great Britain’s task in Asia with a power and eloquence which created a profound impression. “I shall never forget the effect of your speech at the Guildhall,” wrote Mrs. Craigie, “and the astonishment it provoked among the cynical.” And *The Times* asserted that it would take rank among the most memorable of the utterances in that historic chamber. “When he speaks of India there is a glamour about his words which is the reflection not of gorgeous day dreams like those of Lord Beaconsfield, but of the sane idealism which is the mainspring of his untiring energy.”<sup>1</sup>

But the functions and the speeches were the least part of the strain imposed upon him; for the summer and autumn of 1904 were to be marked by events of profound and evil import. Before many

<sup>1</sup>*The Times* of July 21st, 1904.

## CURZON, 1904

weeks had passed, Lady Curzon was struck down with grievous illness. And to the burden of his own physical suffering and of worry, arising out of the grave issues affecting his Indian policy which crowded one upon another, was added a torment of anxiety caused by the alarming state of her health. Everything seemed to be conspiring to deprive them of the peace and quiet which they so much needed ; and before they had been many days in the " darling old castle," Lord Curzon was writing of it in a very different strain. " Mary has been very ill," he told Sir Schomberg MacDonnell, " and we have had a poorish time in this ancestral doghole." Later he wrote in sore distress—" I cannot describe to you the agonising suspense through which I am passing hour after hour, just on the brink of death."<sup>1</sup> Rightly or wrongly he attributed Lady Curzon's illness to the insanitary state of the building. " The doctors say that all the floors ought to be ripped up and the old panelling taken down," he wrote on October the 18th. " . . . I assure you that it is uninhabitable. I am clearing all my own things out now and having the place disinfected. All the castle things will then be put back and in a week's time the place will be as I received it." And he added that if required to do so, he would be glad to explain to the authorities what it was that the castle wanted—" But it will be for another not for me."<sup>2</sup> Lady Curzon had made him promise to give up the post and he had required little persuasion, for his own feelings were such that he declared that nothing would induce him to sleep another night in the building when once he had succeeded in escaping from it. Before he left for India he had tendered his resignation.

From a political point of view Lord Curzon's visit was a bitter disappointment. Much had been hoped from it in the way of clearing up differences between him and the authorities at White-hall. Relations between the Viceroy and the India Council had become more rather than less strained as time went on, and during the past winter Sir A. Godley had written in a gloomy vein of the feeling at his end of the line. " What I think most desirable at this moment is that you should do whatever you can to remove the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm, September 25th, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir S. MacDonnell.

## THE SUMMER OF 1904

impression which certainly exists, that you are inclined when there is a difference of opinion to carry your protest beyond the recognised official limits, to bring pressure to bear to force the hand of the Government at home. You will say at once that the impression is most incorrect and unfair. Still I venture to urge you to remember that it exists." Of the newly appointed Secretary of State he had added that his relations with everyone in the office were most cordial ; but that this must not be taken to imply that he was likely to accept without demur everything that was put up to him by his Department. Nor was he at all likely to take his cue from India. "It is a bold thing to attempt a diagnosis of this kind in writing to one who knows him so well, but I am quite sure that you would be wrong if you were to count on his being either ductile or malleable."<sup>1</sup>

St. John Brodrick himself had been convinced that, with regard to many of the matters outstanding between them, the distance of many thousand miles by which they were separated counted for much. "I feel sure that a great number of these questions could be settled orally without the slightest difficulty."<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon had agreed. "I am greatly looking forward to seeing you all before long ; and to discussing the many subjects of public interest," he told the Prime Minister. "You will not find the *enfant terrible* so bad as you think."<sup>3</sup>

The tone of his correspondence with St. John Brodrick since the latter had become Secretary of State had been friendly and at times cordial. "I am looking forward greatly to our merry-making on May the 18th," he had written shortly before leaving India. "It will be a great day in our already well-stocked records of festivity." Yet, any one familiar with the voluminous correspondence between them in the past could scarcely fail to notice that the tone of their communications, though amicable, had undergone a subtle change. It lacked its former spontaneity. Lord Curzon would, in fact, have been more than human if, in spite of the intimate relations which had existed between them in the past, he had regarded the appointment of St. John Brodrick to the India Office

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated November 27th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated March 24th, 1904.

<sup>3</sup>Letter dated February 19th, 1904.

## CURZON, 1904

as being from his own point of view the ideal one. He perhaps recalled what the latter had written to him many years before, when he had predicted his early inclusion in the Cabinet, in which position he had declared—"You will have no more ardent supporter (though in a humble capacity) than myself."<sup>1</sup> How different the actual situation which the whirligig of time had brought about. While St. John Brodrick himself was in the Cabinet, Lord Curzon was not. And far from the former now being associated with him in a subordinate capacity, he was in a position of authority over him in respect of the very matters of which he himself made no pretence to possessing any special knowledge, but of which Lord Curzon's knowledge and experience were admitted to be unique. The Secretary of State was fully conscious of the delicacy of the position. "I know," he wrote, after a discussion with Lady Curzon, "it is heartrending when one has sat up many nights, fought and slaved and mastered a subject and the end seems near, to be checked by those who from circumstances have not a tithe of the experience or the trouble." And he assured her that it was his constant endeavour to reduce opposition to the Viceroy's measures to a minimum. "You will not believe it, but the Secretary of State practically abdicates his legal function and becomes George's ambassador at the Court of St. James.... Don't think I am complaining of this; I knew it when I took the post."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as Lord Curzon well knew, the power to overrule was there, even if it was kept discreetly in the background—and in the end a malignant Fate was to whisk it out of the cupboard in which it lay, and to thrust it into the Minister's hands in circumstances in which its use was destined to prove fatal.

Before Lord Curzon reached England Lady Curzon had warned him that the Cabinet were very nervous about Tibet. "I think it would be very grave if a crisis happened in India now, as they would tie your hands absolutely here and you would have to resign. Tibet has frightened the whole Cabinet, and they think it rash and are frightened to death. People talk of it more than of Russia and their ignorance is amazing."<sup>3</sup> Within a few days of the receipt of this

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated May 29th, 1878.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, February 16th, 1904.

<sup>3</sup>Letter dated March 4th, 1904.

## THE SUMMER OF 1904

letter occurred the first serious episode in the advance of Colonel Younghusband's Mission to Gyantse. On March the 31st the road a few miles short of Guru was blocked by an armed force of 2,000 Tibetans. An attempt to disarm them resulted in a mêlée, in the course of which a Tibetan soldier let off his rifle and a general attack ensued. The casualties on the British side were trifling, but the Tibetans lost six hundred killed and wounded. "I am sure Young-husband will have been miserable over the fighting in Tibet," Lord Curzon wrote on April the 6th. "He was bent on getting through to Gyantse without a row if he could. The whole affair looks woefully like a massacre. But it seems to have been inevitable and it sprang up in a sudden quite unpremeditated sort of way, which I think frees our men from all suspicion of blame."<sup>1</sup> But the incident was not calculated to lessen the Cabinet's dislike of the whole enterprise.

While Lord Curzon was still on the high seas, further hostility on the part of the Tibetans at Gyantse led Lord Ampthill's Government to urge upon the Secretary of State the desirability of giving the Tibetan authorities a definite time in which to come to terms at the latter place, and, in the event of their refusing to negotiate, of his sanctioning an advance to the capital. Consent was given, and on August the 3rd the Mission reached Lhasa.

In the meantime the Government of India had submitted their views as to the terms to be demanded of Tibet when the provisions of the new Convention came under discussion. They again urged the appointment of an accredited British Agent in Tibet to reside at Lhasa, or failing that at Gyantse ; the cession of the Chumbi valley to Great Britain ; the razing of all fortifications on the road between India and the Tibetan capital ; a formal pledge by the Tibetan Government that they would enter into no relations with any Foreign Power without the approval of Great Britain ; the establishment of trade marts at Gyantse and at suitable centres in Western and Eastern Tibet ; and finally the payment of an indemnity to meet the cost of the expedition which the refusal of the Tibetans to negotiate had compelled them to undertake.

On receipt of these proposals in July, Lord Curzon was invited to

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon.

discuss them with leading members of the Cabinet. In spite of his strong support of them in their entirety, the Government decided against the appointment of a British Resident at Lhasa or anywhere else ; and further ordered that no indemnity was to be asked which the Tibetans were unlikely to be able to pay by instalments spread over a maximum period of three years, and that the Chumbi valley should remain in British occupation only until the indemnity had been paid, or the trade marts had been in effective operation for three years, whichever date might be the latest.

In Lhasa itself the attitude of the Tibetans, which had been sullen and obstructive on the arrival of the Mission, underwent a remarkable change. Contact with Colonel Younghusband and other members of the Mission quickly dispelled preconceived ideas both as to the character of the British people and as to the objects which the British Government had in view ; and by September the 4th Colonel Younghusband was able to report that the Tibetan authorities were ready to accept the terms submitted to them, provided that they were permitted to spread the payment of the indemnity of seventy-five lakhs of rupees demanded over a period of seventy-five years. A Convention embodying this provision was accordingly signed on September the 7th.

The amount of the indemnity was regarded by His Majesty's Government as altogether excessive ; and they pointed out that, in agreeing to payment being spread over so long a period, Colonel Younghusband had deliberately contravened their definite instructions. Matters had, however, passed for the time being out of Lord Curzon's hands, and it would be beyond the scope of this book to discuss either the reasons for Colonel Younghusband's action, or the circumstances in which the amount of the indemnity was subsequently reduced and the terms of the Treaty brought within the limit of the instructions which the Cabinet had laid down.

It was not only in Tibet that matters came to a head during the summer of 1904. Shortly before Lord Curzon left India for England, he had received a further refusal from the Amir of Afghanistan to meet him for purposes of personal discussion. And in July that potentate had made it unmistakably clear that nothing would induce him to leave Kabul. Lord Ampthill's Government had thereupon

## THE SUMMER OF 1904

proposed the despatch of an Envoy to the Afghan capital. This at once brought to the fore the question on which Lord Curzon and the Cabinet had for long been at variance, namely, the form which any new Agreement with the Amir should take. It has been made plain already that, while Lord Curzon attached the utmost importance to a clear definition of the obligations devolving upon the two countries being embodied in a formal document, the Cabinet were prepared to accept an assurance from the Amir that he adhered to the Agreement made with his father, without enquiring too closely into the interpretation which he placed upon it. And to this difference of opinion as to the end to be aimed at was added a difference of view as to the manner in which the Amir should be approached.

In Lord Curzon's opinion it was desirable to secure satisfactory pledges before payment of the subsidy was agreed to, while the Cabinet inclined to the view that the Amir would prove more amenable if promises of the subsidy and of British protection were given first, and questions on which assurances or satisfaction were required were raised afterwards. There had been constant friction, consequently, over the tone and content of the letters addressed by the Viceroy to the Amir. "All the more important ones," he complained in a letter to Lady Curzon, "are sent home and invariably gutted by the India Office and the Cabinet, who don't know the A B C of Afghan politics. They will not leave me to handle the Amir as I think he ought to be handled and then they blame me if the letters are a failure."<sup>1</sup>

In August 1904 the Cabinet found themselves in disagreement not only with Lord Curzon, but with Lord Ampthill's Government and even more emphatically with Lord Kitchener, who held that since the defence of India was the primary object of friendly relations with Afghanistan, military considerations should predominate over all others in any Agreement to be made with the Amir. He therefore urged that, failing a definite Agreement under which the Government of India would be accorded the ordinary rights of allies and would be entitled to take the steps necessary to plan and put into operation a practical scheme of defence, it would be better to stop

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 10th, 1904.

## CURZON, 1904

both the subsidy and the importation of arms, and to repudiate all responsibility for the defence of the Amir's territories. The proposal was one which the Cabinet decided that they were unable to accept ; and they resolved to approach the Amir with suggestions for a renewal, without material alteration, of the engagements which existed with his father.

In these circumstances it is a little surprising that Lord Curzon should have been invited to draw up the *aide-memoire* embodying the instructions to be given to the Government's Envoy. It is less surprising that on receipt of it the Cabinet should have proceeded to effect substantial alterations, or, as Lord Curzon would probably have put it, to gut it. But having issued the invitation and having subjected it to revision, the Cabinet must be held to have accepted it. And Lord Curzon had legitimate grounds for complaint when at a later stage of the proceedings—it having become clear that the Amir would not willingly discuss the various matters dealt with in the document—they decided to abandon them, and, in conveying their decision to the Viceroy, explained that these various matters had only been included in the scope of the negotiations in deference to the strong views which he had expressed upon the matter.

There is, however, no necessity to trouble the reader further, either with the *aide-memoire* or with the draft Treaty which accompanied it, since the Amir refused to consider either document. And the main result of the discussions which took place between Lord Curzon and the Cabinet over their composition was to show how little had been achieved in the way of adjusting the different standpoints from which they viewed the question.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

JUNE—DECEMBER 1904

It has been seen that upon two of the more important questions on which grave differences had arisen between Lord Curzon and the Cabinet, the personal discussions, to which the Secretary of State had looked to effect a *rapprochement*, had failed of their purpose. And it has now to be added that Lord Curzon had not been many days in the country when an even blacker cloud made its appearance upon the summer sky.

On June the 15th, at the invitation of the Prime Minister, Lord Curzon attended a meeting of the Imperial Defence Committee. To his intense surprise he found, among the papers circulated at the meeting, a Memorandum by Lord Kitchener condemning in forcible terms the system of military administration in India, and urging a transference of the greater part of the functions appertaining to the Military Member of the Government of India from that authority to the Commander-in-Chief. It appeared that the Memorandum had been handed to the Prime Minister by an officer who had been deputed by Lord Kitchener, in agreement with the Viceroy, to represent his views on the subject of Indian Defence when that subject came under the consideration of the Defence Committee. Lord Curzon at once pointed out that the paper dealt not with the question of Indian Defence, but with a highly controversial question of Indian administration. The Prime Minister thereupon explained that it had not been his intention that it should be discussed by the Committee, and it was withdrawn. But its appearance amongst the papers

## CURZON, 1903

circulated apprised Lord Curzon of the fact that Lord Kitchener intended to take advantage of his absence from India to bring to a head the difference between himself and the Viceroy on the question of military administration which, in deference to the advice of the latter, he had hitherto refrained from doing. And since this became the crucial question between Lord Curzon and the Cabinet on which he eventually resigned, it is desirable to trace briefly the course of his relations with Lord Kitchener.

In spite of the opposition of his military advisers, Lord Curzon, as we have seen, had consistently urged the appointment of Lord Kitchener to the post of Commander-in-Chief and had welcomed his arrival with enthusiasm. He knew of him by reputation as a man of somewhat rough and ready methods ; but he had hardly realised the extent of his ignorance of the ordinary procedure of Government, or of the strong temperamental difficulty which he experienced in proceeding by any but the most direct—and consequently autocratic—methods. He viewed at first with interest and some amusement, though later with alarm, the means by which he sought to prosecute his plans. In a letter to Lord George Hamilton written on January the 13th, 1903, he observed—

“ He seems to think that the military government of India is to be conducted by concordat between him and me. Accordingly he comes and pours out to me all sorts of schemes to which he asks my consent. It is all so frank and honest and good tempered that one cannot meet these advances with a rebuff. Here and there I head him off or steer him into more orthodox channels. But of course as yet he does not know the ropes.”

The difficulty was in reality of a much more fundamental nature. Lord Kitchener started his Indian career with a violent bias against the system under which the executive control of the army in India was vested in one authority—the Commander-in-Chief—and the administrative control in another, namely, the Government of India itself. And, in particular, he disliked above all things the practice under which the Government ordinarily delegated its authority in

## RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

military matters to a Military Member, precisely in the same way as in matters of internal administration it entrusted its powers to a Home Member, or in matters affecting agriculture to a Member in charge of the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, the Government as a whole accepting responsibility for what was done in its name. The system, in fact, was modelled on that of Cabinet responsibility at home, the Military Member and the Commander-in-Chief corresponding roughly, in so far as their functions were concerned, with the Secretary of State for War and the Commander-in-Chief in England. In other important respects, however, the system differed from the home analogy. For in India the Commander-in-Chief usually sat and voted in Council as well as the Military Member; the latter, though discharging duties which were in the main of civil character, was invariably a soldier ; while in official precedence and social prestige the post of Commander-in-Chief ranked second only to that of the Viceroy himself. Thus, while the Military Member was a soldier inferior in rank and prestige to the Commander-in-Chief, he was the channel through which proposals made by the Commander-in-Chief were submitted to Government ; and it was part of his duty, as Member in charge of the Military Department, to comment upon all such proposals more particularly from the point of view of finance and of their effect upon administration generally.

Lord Kitchener himself, as has been seen, had originally aspired to the Military Membership, and even after his appointment to the post of Commander-in-Chief had been doubtful whether he ought not to have pressed for the former appointment. In the course of his very first interview with Lord Curzon in December 1902 he spoke about his position and powers and said that he still felt that he had, perhaps, made a mistake in coming out as Commander-in-Chief and that he ought rather to have been Military Member. Lord Curzon asked him to wait a little until he had had an opportunity of seeing how the system worked before he formed opinions on the subject. To this he agreed.

Within three months, however, he returned to the charge. "A few days ago he consulted me as to whether it would be desirable to bring up the ideas that are floating in his mind (and which are

## CURZON, 1903

expressed in an article in the current number of the *Fortnightly Review*) to clip the wings of the Military Member and to reduce the latter to relative impotence as compared with himself. I said most certainly not. I thought that he had better wait until he had been a year in the country before he began to pull our system to pieces. He readily accepted this advice.”<sup>1</sup>

His acquiescence did not deter him, however, from forwarding a copy of his memorandum on the subject to Lord Roberts for his confidential information. Nor could he accommodate himself to the procedure which the system demanded. “He abominates our files and departmental method of working,” Lord Curzon wrote on one occasion. “In fact he is just like a caged lion stalking to and fro and dashing its bruised and lacerated head against the bars.” His vagaries were certainly beginning to give rise to serious misgivings. “In many ways I am a little nervous about Kitchener,” Lord Curzon told the Secretary of State on May the 7th, 1903, “because having hitherto been in a position of undisputed command and in circumstances such as those of active warfare where his voice was supreme and where military dominated political considerations, he expects to find the same conditions revived here.” In his impetuous way he proposed the creation of a number of batteries of native field artillery—a proposal which raised a principle, as the Viceroy was quick to point out, of “vast and tremendous significance.” Nevertheless without considering it necessary to await—or even to ask—the opinion of the Military Department, he requested that his scheme should be telegraphed to the Secretary of State and that the latter should be asked to cable his reply. The Viceroy very naturally insisted on so revolutionary a proposal being dealt with by the Government of India in the regular way. It was accordingly submitted to the Military Department whose head, General Sir Edmund Elles, being of course acquainted with Indian tradition and practice in the matter, set forth the objections to the scheme. Whereupon Lord Kitchener withdrew it with the same impetuosity with which he had originally put it forward.

Lord Kitchener was, unfortunately, too proud or too contemptuous of the opinions of others, to discuss his various proposals

<sup>1</sup>Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, February 26th, 1903.

## RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

informally with other members of the Government—least of all with the Military Member.

“ He stands aloof and alone, a molten mass of devouring energy and burning ambitions without anybody to control or guide it in the right direction. Now the Viceroy, as long as he is a personal friend of this remarkable phenomenon, is the only man who can supply the want ; and therefore it is that during the remainder of my time here I shall endeavour, as far as possible, by the frankest intercourse and interchange of opinion to avoid the dangers that otherwise lie ahead.”<sup>1</sup>

During the early part of the summer of 1903, friction between the Commander-in-Chief and the Military Member became a source of acute anxiety to the Viceroy. On May the 25th, Lord Kitchener actually wrote threatening resignation unless he could have his way. The subject of the particular difference which gave rise to this threat will be explained hereafter ; it was of the most trivial nature, and little difficulty was experienced in finding a *modus vivendi*. But the episode itself is important because it provides the first example of the means of which Lord Kitchener made increasingly frequent use as time went on, with a view to overcoming opposition to his plans ; and also because it drew from Lord Curzon a further expression of his determination to do all that he conscientiously could to meet Lord Kitchener’s wishes.

“ I want you clearly to recognise,” he wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State on May the 28th, “ that no effort on my part shall be wanting to prevent such a stupid disaster as the loss of Kitchener’s services. I am not looking at it from the point of view of public opinion alone, though I know well that however trumpery the issue on which he might elect to go, public opinion in England (though certainly not in India) would side with him, and say he had been driven out by me, or by the bureaucracy, or by anything but the real cause. I am regarding it from the point of view of the advantage of the Empire. If only we can tide over his first year by the end of

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Lord Curzon to the Secretary of State, May 14th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1903

which he must to some extent have learned the ropes, all may yet be well . . . The only safeguard of the situation and the only possible preventive of disaster is that I should remain his friend. The moment that we are estranged or that public opinion begins to think seriously that we are quarreling, the crash is certain to come."

A few days later he sided with Lord Kitchener in a disagreement with Sir Edmund Elles over an appointment, and retailed the event to the Secretary of State with a flash of his old humour—

" Ever since, I have been expecting the resignation of Elles, which would have been an appropriate balance to that of Kitchener the week before. I must say I feel my position most deeply. . . . I provide a Tom Tidler's ground on which these two turkey-cocks fight out their weekly contests each clamouring to get me on his side, and threatening me with resignation if I take the other. Moreover it is all so unnecessary and so stupid. If only Kitchener would show a little grace and tact things would go better. As it is I am the focus of a perpetual turmoil which I have done nothing to provoke, and of which I am a mortified but helpless spectator. I am told too, that all sorts of fresh combats are ahead to which I look forward with an almost sickening apprehension." <sup>1</sup>

But Lord Kitchener now seems to have realised that he had little to gain by forcing an issue while Lord Curzon was in India ; and, though his relations with the Military Member continued to be strained, he made no further attempt before Lord Curzon sailed for England to raise the question of the abolition of the post. He must have realised, too, that if he was not to lay himself open to further rebuffs, he must walk more warily. The question of the creation of batteries of native field artillery was not the only one in which, by his ignorance of Indian conditions, he had unwittingly vindicated the importance of the Military Department. He had laid himself open to similar correction when asked for his estimate of the number of troops required in the event of the despatch of Colonel

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated June the 4th, 1903.

## RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

Younghusband's Mission into Tibet. For it fell to the Military Member to explain the utter impracticability, in view of the geographical circumstances of Tibet, of the proposal which Lord Kitchener put forward for a combatant force of six thousand British and Native troops, accompanied by nine hundred men (hospitals) and three thousand followers.

At any rate, whatever the cause, Lord Kitchener's attitude underwent a marked change and on July the 9th, 1903, Lord Curzon wrote from Naldera that the atmosphere had cleared.

" He (Kitchener) is out with me here in camp at this moment and not a cloud flecks the sky. . . . Though he must surely have known that I pressed for his appointment to India and did everything to smooth his advent, he confesses to having started with the idea that I was opposed to him and was bent on wrecking his schemes. He now realises his mistake and is aware that I am his best friend. The latter frame of mind is as sensible as the earlier was unjust, and if it can be maintained I can see no reason why there should be any trouble in the future."

And, in the course of his first official letter to St. John Brodrick on October the 2nd, he was able to make an equally satisfactory report — " Kitchener you know. He commenced by trying to destroy the Military Department and to concentrate the administrative and financial, as well as the executive, work of the Indian army in his own hands. This I declined to allow, and he has now settled down to his work, in which he is introducing a great deal of timely zeal and efficiency."

When Lord Curzon spoke of himself as being Lord Kitchener's best friend he was guilty of no exaggeration. Except on the question of the Military Membership and on proposals put forward in obvious ignorance of Indian conditions, he gave him staunch and consistent support. His driving power and love of efficiency struck a responsive chord in his own breast and the matters on which he found himself and his new Commander-in-Chief in agreement far exceeded those on which they differed. On the importance of arriving at a definite military understanding with the Amir of Afghanistan ; on

## CURZON, 1904

the strategic aspect of the Nushki-Sistan railway ; on the problem of conflicts between British soldiers and Natives of the country ; on the desirability of instituting a Staff College in India ; on the necessity for holding Chitral and on the soundness of the Viceroy's instinct in raising corps of Frontier Militia ; on the unwisdom of constituting a reserve for India in South Africa ; and last, but not least, on the supreme importance of Lord Kitchener's scheme of army redistribution and reorganisation, the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief were in close and hearty accord. " Only last night," Lord Curzon wrote on September the 9th, 1903, " I noted with approval on his scheme for establishing a Staff College in India. . . . Kitchener is, I think, quite right. The great desideratum of modern warfare is a trained and competent staff ; you cannot get it except by a special and technical system of instruction ; and it is much better that it should be available in this country, where the bulk of staff officers should go through it, than that a limited number only should be able at a considerable outlay to themselves to proceed to a not altogether suitable Institution at home."

It is important that this should be made clear, since the difference between the Government of India and the Commander-in-Chief on the question of the Military Department gave rise to rumours, which were given prominence in certain newspapers in England, that Lord Kitchener was being hampered and thwarted in the measures which he desired to take to place the defence of India on the basis necessary to meet the altered conditions of the time, brought about in the main by rapid increases in the strategic railways being built by Russia in the direction of Afghanistan, and by experience of modern warfare gained in the course of the South African campaign. " You must not believe English extracts about India," Lord Curzon told his father in the spring of 1903 ; " there is not one word of truth in the story about Kitchener not getting his scheme. He is getting everything that he wants and more, far more than any Commander-in-Chief ever got before." <sup>1</sup>

Even in the matter of the Military Department Lord Curzon did everything that he could, short of agreeing to its abolition, to smooth the working of the machine. In the course of a frank discus-

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 16th, 1903.

## RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

sion of the question Lord Kitchener had told the Viceroy that it was intolerable to him that proposals which emanated from himself as Commander-in-Chief, should be criticised by any subordinate Military authority. It was, of course, a recognised necessity of the departmental system of Government that proposals made by Members of the Government should be commented on by officials who were subordinate to them. It was a necessity from which the Viceroy himself was not exempt. But in order to meet Lord Kitchener's wishes as far as circumstances allowed, Lord Curzon suggested to him that, before putting forward any of his big schemes, he should send his Adjutant-General with a sketch of them to the Secretary in the Military Department, in order to ascertain informally what the view taken by the Department would be. In this way his schemes could be co-ordinated with Indian experience and fact before they came officially before the Indian Government. As a corollary to this suggestion, Lord Curzon suggested further that the records of any such discussions, relating to any schemes from which the Commander-in-Chief in the light of further information decided to withdraw, should not be printed in the departmental files or circulated for information, but should be kept as confidential documents in the office.

This did not touch the principle, however, for which Lord Kitchener was contending, namely, that administrative and political control should be combined with executive control in the person of the Commander-in-Chief. And during Lord Curzon's absence in England in 1904 his relations with Lord Ampthill's Government became so strained that in June he threatened to resign and in September actually telegraphed his resignation home.

News of this startling development was received by the Cabinet with consternation. Coming when it did, it was sufficiently disconcerting. Japan, with whom since 1902 we had been in formal alliance, was at war with Russia, our own hereditary enemy at the gates of India. At any time the resignation of a soldier of Lord Kitchener's standing would have been regarded as a misfortune; at such a time it wore the appearance of a calamity, and strenuous endeavours were made to keep him at his post. On a promise of full consideration being given to any complaints which he might desire

## CURZON, 1904

to bring against any other Department Lord Kitchener consented to withdraw his resignation. But he did so on the understanding that the existing system of Army Control would be investigated by a Commission from home, or in such other way as the Cabinet might decide. The Government were thus committed to an examination of the question, and as a first step Lord Curzon was invited to state his views. This he did in a Memorandum drawn up on November the 2nd, from which it was clear that he was unalterably opposed to any such change as Lord Kitchener advocated. His arguments were impressive; but whether they carried conviction or not, the Government were pledged to something more definite in the way of enquiry, and the Prime Minister put the matter frankly to Lord Curzon. In view of the growing menace of war in the neighbourhood of the Indian frontier, they had sent to India the soldier who—apart from Lord Roberts—commanded the greatest measure of public confidence. “I tore my vitals out for you about Kitchener,” St. John Brodrick had written in a letter to the Viceroy as far back as March the 22nd, 1901. “It will probably go far to wrecking my period of office. . . . But as you know I think the Empire is a whole and your need is greater than mine. So I gave in and told the Cabinet the reason. I had meant to make him the Chief of the Staff. You have helped us so much, you deserve anything.” That soldier was now on the brink of resignation, and had made it abundantly clear that he would not remain in India if the system of Military Control was to remain unchanged. The Prime Minister had little doubt that, if he did resign he would not only carry public opinion in England with him, but would imperil the defence of India—and quite possibly bring down the Government—at an intensely critical moment in the history of the Empire. In these circumstances what did Lord Curzon suggest with a view to meeting the difficulties of the situation?

To these representations Lord Curzon replied on November the 9th, in the course of the last conversation which he had with Mr. Balfour before sailing for India on the 24th. In the event of the Cabinet being determined to send out a Commission of Enquiry, he would feel compelled to repeat before it the objections to Lord Kitchener’s scheme which he had already placed before the Government in his Memorandum of November the 2nd; but he pointed





LADY CURZON IN THE FAMOUS PEACOCK DRESS

## RELATIONS WITH LORD KITCHENER

out that the more ordinary procedure, if the Government were resolved to pursue the matter, would be for the Secretary of State to address the Government of India by Despatch, requesting them to examine the case and to report the conclusions which they arrived at in their reply. This course was subsequently adopted and a Despatch dated the 2nd of December was duly addressed to the Government of India.

Thus Lord Curzon's holiday came to a close amid a storm of bitter controversy. If the Prime Minister entertained doubts as to the wisdom of launching him upon a second term of office in these unpromising circumstances, he refrained from acting on them. It is, perhaps, surprising that Lord Curzon himself was willing to go back in view of the turn which events had taken. Lady Curzon's serious illness was a reason against his doing so which would have appealed to the sympathy of the public. And there can be little doubt that her personal inclinations were all against it. She had, indeed, grown to think of India with feelings almost of dread. Her health had suffered from the climate, and there had been occasions on which nothing but an iron determination not to fail the Viceroy had enabled her to carry through her duties. Her faith in her ability to answer to the call of duty was indomitable. "Every bit of my vitality has gone," she wrote a few days before the great Durbar at Delhi which was to make so heavy a demand upon her strength, "and I am iller than I have ever been and simply can't get back to life. But I believe absolutely in my power of 'coming up to time,' or 'answering my ring' as an actor does in the wings of a theatre."<sup>1</sup> How faithfully she answered her ring at Delhi was seen by the thousands who admired and applauded her in the brilliant part which she played on that tremendous stage. "The Diwan-i-Khas," wrote Mr. Perceval Landon on January the 13th, 1903, "at the moment when your peacock feather dress moved across it, was the zenith of the sheer beauty of the whole time."

But she had a premonition of the day when the drama of life would end in tragedy. "Some day, though, the bell will go and I shall not appear, as India, I know, slowly but surely murders women. But I suppose many humble and inconsequent lives must

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Curzon, December 17th, 1902.

## CURZON, 1904

always go into the foundations of all great works and great buildings and great achievements.”<sup>1</sup> And now that Lord Curzon was about to return to India under a sky that was heavily overcast, she lay once more iller than she had ever been before and quite unable to answer her ring. She knew, too, that Lord Curzon was overwrought in body and mind, and the knowledge that she could not be at his side to comfort and sustain him in the day of trouble of which she had forebodings added to the anguish with which each viewed the approaching hour of parting. “It is with a sad and miserable heart that I go leaving all that makes life worth living behind me,” he wrote, “and going out to toil and isolation and often worse. But it seems to be destiny ; and God who has smitten us so hard must surely have better things in store.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet in spite of everything Lord Curzon would not give in. “I am up to bid farewell to my illustrious Sovereign,” he wrote to Ian Malcolm in the autumn of 1904, “after which I fade away into the illimitable East.” And if it be asked why, Lord Curzon himself supplies the answer—an answer which to him was always final. “I was aware that a severe struggle lay before me. I felt it a duty, however, to the Government of which I had been the head for so long not to desert it in the hour of trial, but to sacrifice all personal considerations to the necessity of fighting its battles.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lord Curzon, December 17th, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon, November 25th, 1904.

<sup>3</sup>From a note written by Lord Curzon in 1905.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

DECEMBER 1904—APRIL 1905

LORD CURZON reached Bombay on December the 9th and resumed the Viceroyalty in Calcutta on December the 13th. An unusually large number of Indian Princes had travelled to Bombay to welcome him ; and those who witnessed his arrival commented on the numbers in which the Native population of the city turned out to see him, and on the demonstrative character of their welcome. He was himself surprised at the interest which his return evoked—"I was given a great reception in Bombay, scarcely inferior, if at all, to that which I had when landing under the full glamour of novelty six years ago."<sup>1</sup> Similar, though less demonstrative, crowds turned out to witness his entry into Calcutta ; and, a few weeks later, on the unexpected return of Lady Curzon to India, the reception accorded to them by the populace was even more remarkable.

On January the 25th, to his own intense surprise, Lord Curzon received news by telegram that the doctors not only permitted Lady Curzon to travel, but considered that the voyage to India would be of benefit to her. "Mary's recovery is like herself, one of the wonders of the age," he wrote. "I could scarcely believe the telegram that said she was coming out."<sup>2</sup> And to the joy which her return afforded him was added astonishment at the widespread outburst of thanksgiving to which her recovery gave rise. "I spent most of last week in the train, going to and from Bombay to fetch Lady Curzon,"

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Secretary of State, December 14th, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm, February 2nd, 1905.

## CURZON, 1905

he told Sir A. Godley on March the 9th. "She had such a reception there, and still more here, as I venture to say that no English woman has ever had in India before. The Calcutta streets were decorated and crowded as though for some great public ceremonial. At the railway station she was presented with a valuable jewel purchased by the Corporation out of their own pockets ; while the ladies of Calcutta, who were assembled at Government House in hundreds, handed her a very costly carved ivory casket and Address. The Calcutta Light Horse turned out voluntarily to escort her, and her return was in every sense an ovation." The demonstrations on the part of the Native population were equally remarkable. In the columns of the Indian newspapers Lady Curzon's reception was described as such as no woman, even though she were the consort of the Viceroy, had ever before been given. Her welcome back was accompanied by a display of genuine emotion which "neither Lady Curzon nor the people who witnessed her arrival would easily forget."<sup>1</sup>

The warmth of these remarkable demonstrations was to a large extent the outcome of sympathy with her and of admiration for her courage ; but it was also an additional testimony to the striking position which the Viceroy occupied in the estimation of the people. To prince and peasant alike he stood out as a ruler to be respected and admired, and as a dynamic force in the life of India.

With the politically minded it was different. The popularity which he had for a time enjoyed with the Indian intelligentsia, once so high on account of the stand which he had taken for even-handed justice as between man and man, irrespective of race and creed, had been undermined by his more recent policy. In Bengal in particular the implications which underlay his educational policy were regarded as reflecting on Bengali character ; while his scheme for the partition of the Province was interpreted as a contemptuous challenge to their national aspirations. The people of Bengal are by nature emotional and very sensitive. All Lord Curzon's more recent actions had been calculated to provoke their pride of race ; and wisdom demanded that he should walk warily in his dealings with them. It was particularly unfortunate, therefore, that, at this

<sup>1</sup>*The Hindu Patriot* of March 7th, 1905.

## RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

juncture, he should have gone out of his way to give public utterance to his opinions on a subject which every consideration of tact and prudence ought to have warned him was better left alone.

He had been exasperated by the wild exaggeration which had characterised the campaign waged on the platform and in the press against the chief measures of his administrative programme. And irritation on this score was still fresh in his mind when he proceeded to the seventh Convocation of the Calcutta University, over which he had presided as their Chancellor. In the speech which he delivered he disclaimed any intention of saying anything that might be thought to have a political bearing ; but there were dangers with which youth all the world over was brought face to face, when standing on the threshold of the greater world beyond the college gates ; and against those dangers he desired to put them on their guard. The chief danger of which he warned them was a temptation to minimise the importance of adhering rigidly, in all the varied circumstances of life, to truth. There were many guises in which this particular temptation presented itself. Flattery was one ; vituperation was another. Flattery was only too often a deliberate attempt to deceive—to get something out of someone else by playing upon the commonest foible of human nature. But it seemed to him that in India the danger of the opposite extreme was greater still. To many true friends of India, among whom he counted himself, the most distressing symptom of the day was the degree to which abuse was entering into public controversy, and the tendency to excessive exaggeration which those who indulged in controversy displayed. Let those who were now going forth from the portals of the University be on their guard against these dangers. “Do not exaggerate ; do not flatter ; do not slander ; do not impute ; but turn naturally to truth as the magnet flies to the pole.”

Had Lord Curzon stopped there all might have been well. Unfortunately, he went on to suggest that those whom he was addressing had special cause to be on their guard against such temptations. “I hope I am making no false or arrogant claim when I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception.” He explained that he did not mean to suggest that Europeans were universally truthful, any more than that Asiatics habitually indulged

in falsehood—"the one proposition would be absurd and the other insulting." But he thought it undoubtedly was the case that truth had taken a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East, where craftiness and diplomatic wile had always been held in high repute. "We may prove it by the common innuendo that lurks in the words 'Oriental Diplomacy,' by which is meant something rather tortuous and hyper-subtle. The same thing may be seen in Oriental Literature. In your epics truth will often be extolled as a virtue; but quite as often it is attended with some qualification, and very often praise is given to successful deception practised with honest aim."

We may acquit Lord Curzon of the smallest intention to insult the Indian people. But it must be admitted that he sometimes displayed a surprising lack of perception. His imagination, brilliant though it was in some directions, was not precisely of the kind which enabled him to put himself into other people's skins. Had he pictured himself as a Bengali already smarting under a sense of injury, both in connection with the Universities Act and the impending partition of his Province, he would have realised the unwisdom of saying anything that might be construed as damaging to his *amour propre*. No one, in fact, was more surprised than Lord Curzon himself at the storm of denunciation to which his speech gave rise. And four months later, with echoes of the clamour still ringing in his ears, he gave vent to his feelings of astonishment in a letter to the Secretary of State. "My Convocation Address to Bengali students . . . was travestied as an attack upon the character and scriptures of the entire nation. . . . A more unscrupulous and mendacious agitation it is impossible to conceive." The whole episode was particularly unfortunate, for it not only added to the distractions of the Viceroy at a time when matters of grave difficulty were crowding in upon him, but it had its repercussions in England, where his relations with the Home Government were becoming increasingly strained, and where an atmosphere of hostility towards him was being sedulously fostered in the House of Commons and in the press by English sympathisers with the views and aspirations of the Indian National Congress.

First among the subjects of controversy between him and the

## RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

authorities in England was that of the attitude to be adopted towards the Amir of Afghanistan. Lord Curzon had not been back in India many days before the difficulties with the Amir came to a head. In accordance with the decision of the Cabinet, Mr. Dane had proceeded to Kabul, towards the end of November, with the draft Treaty and the *aide Memoire* drawn up by Lord Curzon and revised by the Cabinet in his pocket. From the first the negotiations had made little progress, and on January the 1st the Amir had brought matters to a head by producing a draft Treaty of his own, which he submitted to the British envoy with an intimation that it represented the utmost limits to which he was prepared to go. The draft was brief. It consisted of an assertion and a promise couched in flowery Persian phraseology. The assertion was to the effect that in all matters great and small he had acted in accordance with the Agreements entered into between Abdur Rahman and the British Government; and the promise was to the effect that he would continue so to act. A somewhat singular document it must be admitted, as Treaties go. It left things, of course, precisely where they were, with the obligations of the parties to the Agreement undefined and the ambiguities, misunderstandings and disputes, which it was the object of the Mission to dispose of, still unresolved.

For the British Mission to return from Kabul with nothing but this to show was, in Lord Curzon's view, unthinkable; and, as the days went by with no sign of improvement, he wrote pessimistically of the situation as one which might lead to a complete rupture with the Amir, with worse consequences shaping in the background. For the deadlock which had been reached he blamed the Government, by whom Habibulla had been so tenderly handled ever since his accession, that he now thought that he could dictate any terms.<sup>1</sup> And with the full concurrence of his colleagues he telegraphed to the Secretary of State, urging that, unless the Amir could be induced to make some advance in the direction required, Mr. Dane should be instructed to withdraw the Mission from Kabul. "I am very worried to-day," he wrote on February the 2nd. "Things in Afghanistan are as bad as they can be. . . . All of us here are united

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir S. MacDonnell, February 13th, 1905.

in thinking that we must put our foot down firmly and refuse to take it up again. But will the Home Government support us? There is the paralysing doubt that always overhangs the Government of India."<sup>1</sup> That was the question that he kept revolving in his mind as he paced feverishly up and down in the great room in the south-west wing of Government House. "In an hour's time," he wrote a week later, "though it is mail afternoon we have a special meeting of Council to decide upon our crucial telegram to the Secretary of State. The Home Government are wobbling pitifully, as they usually do, and want to get out on any terms." The representation already made had met with a chilly reception; but Lord Curzon was determined to make one last appeal before admitting defeat. Hence the hastily summoned meeting of his Council, the outcome of which was a further strongly worded representation to the Secretary of State. Previous experience, it was pointedly observed, led to the belief that firmness would prevail; but even if, contrary to expectation, it led to the collapse of the negotiations this would be preferable to the results of complete surrender.

The days that followed were full of anxiety and suspense. Lord Curzon had planned a short holiday in camp in the jungles of Assam and had invited Lord Lamington to join him. Lord Lamington had reached Calcutta three days after the despatch of the fateful telegram—and no reply had come. The departure fixed for that evening was postponed. Backwards and forwards the Viceroy paced, brooding darkly on the meaning of the baffling silence which had descended heavily upon the offices in Whitehall. "I wait for it hour after hour," he wrote on February the 16th, "postponing our departure from day to day."<sup>2</sup> There was to be no holiday for the Viceroy it seemed, and he sent off his guest that afternoon, promising to follow should circumstances permit.

In Whitehall there were symptoms of uneasiness. Messengers passed to and fro between the India Office and Downing Street. Once more the Cabinet were seriously alarmed. Far from thinking that firmness would prevail, they believed that the presentation of an ultimatum to the Amir would result in the almost certain rupture of the negotiations. They replied, therefore, that they could

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.,

## RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

not contemplate the withdrawal of the Mission without grave concern. They regretted that on the various subsidiary matters, which "in deference to the strong views of Your Excellency," they had agreed to press upon the Amir, the latter had proved intractable, and that on the main question he had put forward a poorly worded draft in substitution for the Treaty approved by them. But in their view the important thing was that, whatever might be thought of his behaviour during the negotiations, his draft did accept the obligations undertaken by his father. And they desired, therefore, that Mr. Dane should be instructed to inform the Amir that his proposed renewal of his father's engagements had been forwarded to His Majesty's Government, who accepted it and authorised their Envoy to sign it. The Treaty was accordingly signed on March the 21st, and on March the 29th the Mission left Kabul.

Lord Curzon's summing up of the achievements of the Mission was a gloomy one. The meagre results obtained could have been equally well secured without a Mission at all, since recognition of the old Agreements on his own terms was what the Amir had pressed for all along. The solitary ground for satisfaction was to be found in the happy frame of mind which his success had apparently induced in the Amir himself. But for the value to be substantial the attitude must be lasting ; and, until it had been subjected to the test of time, it was too much to say that we had not paid an exorbitant price for the equanimity induced by the abandonment on our part of the many matters on which it had been our object to persuade the Amir to come to terms.

The Viceroy certainly felt the humiliation of his Government very deeply ; and he made no attempt to disguise his feelings in his communications with the Secretary of State. Sir A. Godley mentioned the fact that there had been occasions recently on which the Secretary of State had departed from his ordinary practice of handing on to him for perusal the letters which he received from the Viceroy, and that he had been led to infer that he had done so because their contents went beyond what he cared to submit to the official eye. It was not only between the Viceroy and the Cabinet that the gulf was widening ; the rift that had been started by divergences of opinion on public questions was cleaving down into the

deeper and more intimate side of his life and was sundering the ties of friendship which for thirty years had exercised so profound an influence upon him. From the human point of view this was the tragedy of these desolating days.

Fortunately for Lord Curzon amid all these distracting happenings there was one cause for solid satisfaction. The year had once more furnished a handsome surplus ; and, for the second time during his Viceroyalty he was able to afford the taxpayer a substantial measure of relief. He had never hesitated as to the shape which the relief should take.

" My view has always been," he declared in his Budget speech, " that as the revenue of this country comes in the main from the people of the country, it is to the people that the disposable surplus, if there is one, should return." And who, he asked, were the people of whom he spoke ? " They are the patient, humble millions toiling at the well and at the plough, knowing little of Budgets, but very painfully aware of the narrow margin between sufficiency and indigence. It is to them that my heart goes out."

The one tax which touched all classes, down to the very lowest, was the salt tax, and it was with pride that he announced that the salt tax would now be brought down to the lowest figure that it had reached since the Mutiny, in the certainty that the point had long been passed at which the middleman could absorb the reduction, and that it must therefore filter down to the poorest strata of society.

At the conclusion of a speech in which, for the last time, he took a wide survey of the activities of Government, he made a spirited defence of the financial provision made for military expenditure. This item in the Budget had been characterised in the course of the debate as inordinate and alarming. The Viceroy admitted that it was inordinate in the sense that it was beyond the ordinary. But there was nothing alarming in it. The situation might have been described as alarming if, while a rival Power was busy building military railways in the direction of the Afghan frontier, the Govern-

## RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

ment had sat still and done nothing. If they doubted the wisdom of preparation let them cast their eyes to the Far East, where, in their hour of national danger, the Japanese had won, by previous preparation and expenditure, great victories that had extorted the admiration of the world.

“ His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief has presented us with a scheme which is the ripe product not only of his own great experience, but of years of discussion and anticipation in India itself, and whose sole object is so to organise our forces in peace, as to place the largest possible body of men with the least dislocation in the field in time of war. Until universal peace reigns, which will not be in our day, the best custodian of his own house will still be the strong man armed ; and the Government of India, assured that they have the means and reposing confidence in the ability of their military advisers, have accepted the scheme submitted to them, not without careful scrutiny of its features and details, but in the conviction that the heavy charge entailed will be repaid in the increased security that will be enjoyed by the country.”<sup>1</sup>

The reference was to the scheme of re-distribution and re-organisation, the ultimate cost of which was estimated to be upwards of £10,000,000, by which Lord Kitchener proposed to make available for service in the field, after the requirements of internal security had been met, a well equipped and efficient army of nine divisions, in place of six divisions which had been the maximum contemplated under the arrangements hitherto in force.

There was a tendency in some quarters to read into this vast and costly re-organisation a condemnation of the system of army administration in India. The system which had left so much undone, it was argued, stood self-condemned. This, surely, was a strange misreading of history. Those who held this view must have overlooked the fact, that it was under the very system which they condemned that the scheme which they applauded was shaped and carried through. There were, as a matter of fact, a variety of

<sup>1</sup>Speech on the Budget, March 29th, 1905.

reasons why, at this particular juncture, a drastic and expensive revision was found to be necessary : the rapid increase in the construction of strategic railways which Russia was pushing forward in Central Asia ; the revolution in previous ideas as to the capacity of modern railways, brought about by what had actually been accomplished by Russia in the way of moving and supplying troops with the aid of a long, single line of railway only, in Manchuria ; and last but not least the experience of modern warfare gained in the course of three years of war in South Africa. It was Lord Kitchener's good fortune to find at the time when these various causes were demanding the organisation of a much larger and better equipped field army for purposes of war, an expansion in the revenue of India without which no large reform could have taken place. During Lord Elgin's Viceroyalty the necessity for prosecuting the Tirah campaign had put large schemes of re-organisation out of court, even if the funds had been forthcoming. And, during the first two years of Lord Curzon's term of office, famine and financial stringency were equally inimical to extraordinary expenditure.

As soon as the financial position had shown signs of improvement Lord Curzon, alarmed by the shortcomings in British military organisation which had come to light under the searching test of war in South Africa, had turned his attention to military organisation in India. He was hampered not by the system but, in the first place, by lack of funds and, in the second place, by unfortunate casualties in the personnel of the higher command. His first Commander-in-Chief, Sir William Lockhart, had been a dying man. His successor, Sir Power Palmer, had held office only pending the choice of a permanent occupant of the post. And it was because he realised the difficulty of effecting any large measure of reform in such circumstances that Lord Curzon pressed the Home Government continuously to let him have the services of Lord Kitchener. Even so, the foundations of the scheme which was afterwards carried through by Lord Kitchener were laid by his predecessor ; and, but for the financial stringency of earlier years, greater progress would undoubtedly have been made. Early in 1900 the Viceroy told the Secretary of State of his difficulties on this score—

## RESUMPTION OF THE VICEROYALTY

"On Monday we had a special meeting of Council to discuss a fresh schedule of military proposals which have been submitted to us by Collen (then Military Member) in supplement to those of last October and in consequence of the experiences of the present war. We spent many hours in threshing through the various demands, many of them involving great financial expenditure. . . . It is a most difficult thing, in connection with military demands, to sift the wheat from the tares. The sum total of the demands that are made it would be quite impossible for the Indian Government at any time, and still more when it is confronted with an enormous expenditure resulting from famine, to meet. In discriminating we run the risk, should any misfortune or disaster occur later on, of being told that we have failed to provide the army with that which its responsible chiefs declared to be essential. This, however, is an inevitable feature of any discussion of a military programme, and the additional expenditure which we recommend while far from meeting the views of the Military Member, and while accompanied, as it is likely to be, by a voluminous expression of his dissent, yet represents the maximum concessions which we unanimously decided to make."<sup>1</sup>

The large scheme of re-organisation referred to by Lord Curzon in his Budget speech and usually known as Lord Kitchener's scheme, was based on a radical re-distribution of the existing forces in India, which, ever since the Mutiny, had been organised and distributed more with a view to internal security than to war beyond the frontier. The re-organisation depended upon a drastic reduction of what were known as the obligatory garrisons, that is to say, the garrisons to be retained in various centres in the country itself for the preservation of order, before any troops were detailed to form the field army for purposes of war. The possibility of enlarging the field army by reducing the obligatory garrisons was not, as is sometimes supposed, a discovery made by Lord Kitchener. As early as January 1902 Lord Curzon had definitely put it forward as the best means of increasing the size of the army required for

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated February 22nd, 1900.

## CURZON, 1904

active service. In reply to a proposal from home, involving costly additions to the number of British troops in India, he had written—“We want to release troops rather than increase them; indeed release is the most practical form of increase.” And he was able to inform the Secretary of State that, proceeding on these lines, he had arrived at the conclusion, after consultation with the Local Governments, that as a result of reductions in the obligatory garrisons, he could count on thirty-two battalions instead of twenty-five as ready for mobilisation in the field army, which by this means could be increased from four divisions to six. The principle was further considered by the Government of India during the summer of 1902, at the instance of Sir Power Palmer; and the scheme which Lord Kitchener eventually produced was the logical outcome of these discussions.

If, then, the scheme of 1904 was devised by one set of officers, and elaborated and carried to completion by another set under the system of Military Administration obtaining in India, it would seem to have been a vindication rather than a condemnation of the system. But the wells of truth were muddied, and the views of many people coloured by the fierce controversy which now broke out over this very question—a controversy which, owing both to the personality and to the exalted positions occupied by the protagonists in the arena, inevitably generated feelings of bitter and mischievous partisanship. The stage was set, indeed, for a Homeric combat, and the public interest suffered, as it always must do in such circumstances, from the atmosphere in which the question at issue was discussed.

## **CHAPTER XXIX**

### **THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY**

**DECEMBER 1904—NOVEMBER 1905**

AN advance copy of the Despatch of December the 2nd from the Secretary of State to the Government of India—referred to in Chapter XXVII—reached India by the same mail as the Viceroy. It referred to the scheme for the re-distribution and re-organisation of the army which had been submitted for sanction, as having incidentally brought into prominence the fact that in the past full preparation had not been made even for mobilising the much smaller field army which had hitherto been contemplated ; and it asked that the Government at home might be informed of the opinions of the Commander-in-Chief and the Member in charge of the Military Department on the working of the existing system. Answers to various questions were solicited. Was the system one which, in the event of war, might be counted on to give to those responsible for the actual conduct of operations, adequate means for supplying the requirements of the army ? Was it, in the opinion of the Government of India, as a whole one under which the maximum of efficiency was obtained ? Did it afford the fullest provision against wasteful expenditure in times of peace and against complications in case of mobilisation becoming necessary ?

Lord Curzon at once invited the Commander-in-Chief to record his views, and these were submitted by Lord Kitchener in a Minute dated January the 1st. If there had ever been any doubt as to the nature of Lord Kitchener's views, it must immediately have been dispelled by the opening paragraphs of his Minute in which the

system was described as "faulty, inefficient and incapable of the expansion necessary for a great war." In his view Indian military administration had been framed mainly to meet the requirements of peace. In war the system would infallibly break down and, unless it was deliberately intended to court disaster, divided counsels, divided authority and divided responsibility must be abolished. He devoted many pages of print to a description of the evils of the system as he saw them, and he then came to his proposals for reform. They all rested on one fundamental principle, namely, that there should be but one authority responsible for all military matters, in other words that the executive functions of the Commander-in-Chief and the administrative functions of the Military Member should be combined in the hands of a single individual. "I regard the abolition of dual control as imperative." Though he would prefer the retention of the Commander-in-Chief, it was not in his view a matter of great importance which of the two existing authorities disappeared, provided only that one of them did. "In order to emphasise the continuity of both functions though united in one person, I would recommend that the full official title of the future Head of the War Department in India should be "Commander-in-Chief and War Member of Council." To meet the possible contingency of the Commander-in-Chief and War Member being required to take the field, he would appoint an acting Commander-in-Chief, with a seat on the Viceroy's Council, to take charge of the troops remaining behind for purposes of internal security, and to be the adviser of the Government of India on all matters connected with them and with the arrangements for supplying men and stores to the army in the field.

On receipt of Lord Kitchener's Minute, Lord Curzon directed that it should be submitted to the Military Member for his reply to the charges brought against the system by the Commander-in-Chief.

With regard to the charges of failure to provide adequately for the field army, hinted at in Mr. Brodrick's Despatch, Sir Edmund Elles had little difficulty in showing that shortcomings in this respect, which were not denied, were due not to any failure on the part of the Military Department to advise what was required, but to

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

inability on the part of the Government of India and of the Secretary of State himself to sanction the proposals which had been made. He denied that the system was one of dual control. The army in India had but one head, namely, the Governor General in Council. The Commander-in-Chief commanded the army according to rule and practice, while the Military Member represented the Governor General in Council in respect of all business which was not of sufficient importance to be brought before the Council collectively. He replied paragraph by paragraph to the charges which had been brought against his Department by Lord Kitchener ; and concluded by stating his conviction that no one man, however able, could properly deal with the mass of business that would demand the attention of the Commander-in-Chief and Army Member.

On receipt of Sir Edmund Elles's Minute towards the end of January, Lord Curzon proceeded to draw up a Minute in which he recorded his own views on the question, the two sides of which were now before him. After recalling the fact that the existing system had come under examination at frequent intervals in the past, he pointed out that on every such occasion the result had been a confirmation of it and that it might be said, therefore, to be supported by a consensus of authority almost unprecedented in the history of military administration. Nevertheless the conclusions thus arrived at were now disputed *in toto* by an authority in whom all recognised "one of the foremost living masters of the science of military government as well as of the art of war." In these circumstances the Civilian Members of Government were placed in a position of grave responsibility and of obvious difficulty, for they were called on to decide between two sets of opinions irreconcilable with each other and involving the fundamental principles on which the Government of India rested. Basing himself upon six years actual experience of the working of the system, he declared that he was altogether unable to recognise the picture of it which had been drawn by the Commander-in-Chief. A system under which Lord Kitchener himself had been able to carry through a series of reforms that would have more than filled an ordinary quinquennium, and that would stamp his name indelibly on the military history of the country, hardly merited his description of it as one under which it

## CURZON, 1905

was "impossible to formulate or carry out any consistent military policy," or one under which no needed reform could be initiated without being subjected to vexatious and, for the most part, unnecessary criticism and delay.

Coming to Lord Kitchener's proposals for altering the system, he was unable to arrive at any other conclusion than that their result would be not merely to disestablish an individual or even a Department, but to subvert the military authority of the Government of India as a whole, and to substitute for it a military autocracy in the person of the Commander-in-Chief.

"The Commander-in-Chief will not only be the source of all initiative, but the sole instrument of execution. No curb of any sort will exist upon his authority except such as is supplied by the check in financial matters of the Financial Department and the final authority, in the cases requiring Government sanction, of the Government of India; and those ostensible safeguards will be of little avail, since the Government will be left without the expert assistance and advice which are essential to render them effective."

They would have another and equally serious result. The duties already imposed upon the Commander-in-Chief were sufficiently onerous. He was expected

"to supervise the organisation, training, equipment, housing, sanitation, officering, discipline, inspection and movements of the army. He ought to know every division and brigade, to be familiar with the principal stations and cantonments, and to be in touch with all his principal officers. It is his duty to create a capable staff, to be responsible for appointments and promotions, to hold manœuvres and camps of exercise, and to visit the frontiers. In addition he is the Head of the Intelligence Department, and is the natural originator of schemes of military policy and strategy. When war is declared he is responsible for mobilisation in the first place, and for the consequent conduct of expeditions and campaigns. In addition, as an Extraordinary Member of Council, he must see all the

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

papers and take a part in the entire business of Government. He is even called upon to be present at the meetings of the Legislative Council."

This, surely, was as much as one man could be expected efficiently to perform. And he believed that to ask him to assume in addition the control of all the administrative and spending departments, the conduct of correspondence with Local Governments and the Secretary of State, of legislation when such was required, the preparation and defence of the Military Budget, as well as the great mass of routine, inseparable from the administration of so large an army spread over so vast a country and so variously composed—would be to expect of him the impossible. Lord Curzon concluded his Minute by declaring that any reasonable reform or readjustment in the system he would willingly consider.

"But no such proposals are before us ; and the Commander-in-Chief in designing his new edifice is not satisfied until he has completely demolished the old. I cannot recommend that it should be swept away on this single and unsupported indictment, or that there should be substituted for it an organisation which will, in my opinion, be injurious to military continuity, efficiency and control in time of peace, and will expose us to even graver risks in time of war."

Mr. Brodrick's Despatch and the three Minutes were then circulated to the Members of the Council, who one after another gave reasons for dissenting from the proposals put forward by the Commander-in-Chief. The scene in the Council Chamber on March the 10th, when the matter came up for discussion, was a dramatic one. Contrary to all expectation, Lord Kitchener made no attempt to reply to the arguments and criticisms of his colleagues. He sat brooding and silent, except for a brief statement which he read from paper, regretting that he was in a minority of one and declaring that he was unwilling to discuss the matter further. In so doing he chose the course dictated by expediency. He knew well the disadvantage at which he stood in the Council Chamber. At his best in action he was at his worst in discussion.

## CURZON, 1905

A graphic picture of the same man acting in a similar manner, a decade later, has been painted by Lord Esher, who tells of occasions when Lord Kitchener remained dumb under the shock of decisions which, in view of the advice which he had given, he failed altogether to understand. The presence of men sitting round a council table eager and fluent in discussion cowed him into a resentful silence or spurred him to incoherent garrulity. In such circumstances he became the despair of those who sought to work with him. His inability to play a rational part in council became one of the minor problems with which a Cabinet, charged with the conduct of a great war, had to deal. "His form of speech," Lord Esher tells us, "was Cromwellian in its obscurity and incoherence. He would seem to be thinking aloud, his mind tossing in a flood of difficulties. The dialecticians and lawyers who sat round him could make nothing of it or him."

This strange inability to give lucid expression to his thoughts which led him to entrust to others the preparation of his memoranda and his speeches, was responsible on one memorable occasion for a famous and, on any other hypothesis, extremely audacious plagiarism.

"On such occasions as this," he declared in the course of his farewell speech at Simla on August the 20th, 1909, "it has not been unusual—I might almost say it has been customary—for the departing official to give a sort of synopsis of his years of administration. I am sure you will be glad to hear that I have no idea of conforming to that custom. Lists of measures carried into effect or of reforms inaugurated may find a place in a Budget oration or in an official record; they would, I think be out of place in an after dinner speech."

On November the 16th, 1905, when bidding farewell to India, Lord Curzon had said—

"I have been told that on the present occasion I am expected to give a sort of synopsis of the last seven years of administration. I am sure you will be intensely relieved to learn that I

"The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener," by Viscount Esher.

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

intend to disappoint those expectations. Lists of laws or administrative acts or executive policies may properly figure in a Budget speech ; they may be recorded in an official Minute ; they may be grouped and weighed by the historian. But they are hardly the material for an after dinner oration."

Further comparison of the two speeches brought to light other and equally striking resemblances. Someone had evidently blundered. For a few days the episode afforded newspaper readers in two continents mild amusement and was then forgotten. In the Council Chamber at Calcutta on March the 10th Lord Kitchener's silence was not so lightly dismissed.

As he concluded his brief statement a painful hush fell upon the assembly. For some minutes it seemed as if the curtain would be rung down on a stage peopled with disconcerted and tongue-tied players. But for one man present at the Council table there was a personal as well as a political aspect of the case. Grave charges had been brought against the conduct of Sir Edmund Elles in the discharge of his duties as head of the Military Department. To these charges he had replied. Yet Lord Kitchener had neither withdrawn his charges nor attempted to make any answer to the defence. And, taken aback by this abrupt dismissal of the matter, Sir Edmund Elles rose to appeal to those present not to separate without first pronouncing their verdict. Once more the Commander-in-Chief sat plunged in brooding silence, while every Member of the Council declared in turn that he held that the charges against the Military Department had broken down and that Sir Edmund Elles's vindication was complete. This was certainly Lord Curzon's view, for he informed the Prime Minister in a letter summing up the case that the officers of Lord Kitchener's entourage had allowed him

"to put his name to a series of charges which, as it has been my duty to investigate them, I am in a position to say are wholly incapable of substantiation, and to give a description of the situation as he sees it which is not only constitutionally erroneous but quite inconsistent with the facts. When we discussed the matter he could not sustain one of these charges;

## CURZON, 1905

he did not attempt to argue the case. All he could do was to write a Minute of Dissent to the effect that he adhered to his former views.”<sup>1</sup>

Following the decision of March the 10th, a Despatch embodying the unanimous opinion of the Government, with the solitary exception of the Commander-in-Chief, was drafted and issued on March the 23rd. In the course of it two main points were stressed—the danger, in the event of Lord Kitchener’s proposals being given effect to, of civil control over the army and military policy being undermined, and the practical certainty of the task which would be thrown on the Commander-in-Chief proving too great a burden for any one man to bear.

“ His Majesty’s Government may be invited to consider the position which would be produced in England if a Commander-in-Chief of the British army possessed a seat in the Cabinet, if he were the sole representative of the army there, if he enjoyed the power and the rank of the Secretary of State for War in addition, and if His Majesty’s Ministers were called upon to accept or to reject his proposals with no independent or qualified opinion to assist them.”

This, it was asserted, was precisely the situation which the Government of India were asked to accept by Lord Kitchener in India.

In England it was too easily assumed that the difference was a personal one between the Viceroy and Lord Kitchener, and that the Despatch was an expression of Lord Curzon’s views to which the other Members of the Government attached formal signatures. This was not the case. Every Member of the Government recorded his own views both before and after the Despatch was drafted. In view of the importance of the case Lord Curzon wrote the Despatch himself; but it was amended by his colleagues, practically the whole of the alterations which it underwent tending to give the opposition to Lord Kitchener’s proposals greater

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 30th, 1905.

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

emphasis. The few lines of the Despatch given above were based on a note written by one of his civilian colleagues.

To the Despatch itself Lord Kitchener appended a brief Minute of Dissent. Some attempt, he wrote, had been made to dispute his facts, but in his opinion without success.

“ My assertions have been contradicted, but not, I think, disproved. My arguments remain uncontroverted and are, I believe, incontrovertible. I adhere, therefore, to everything that is contained in my Memorandum and it follows that I entirely dissent from the accompanying Despatch.”

So pontifical a manner of disposing of the arguments on the other side naturally excited comment. Lord Ripon, who followed the controversy with the interest of one who had himself occupied the post of Viceroy, could not refrain from expressing his astonishment. Sir Edmund Elles’s defence had carried conviction to his mind, but he awaited Lord Kitchener’s reply. The reply was not, however, forthcoming. “ When I turned to Lord Kitchener’s Minute I found no reply at all. I found nothing but a lofty declaration that he would not reply and that he knew he was quite right.”<sup>1</sup> He certainly thought that this summary way of disposing of the arguments on the other side weakened Lord Kitchener’s case. “ In a controversy of this description I am always a little inclined to think that a person who takes that line and refuses to reply in that tone does so because he cannot reply, because he has no answer to what his opponent has said.”<sup>2</sup> Lord Ripon could not know, of course, what was the fact, that Lord Kitchener, while refusing to reply either in the Council Chamber or in any official document, had nevertheless attached his signature to a voluminous and detailed criticism of the Minutes written by both Sir Edmund Elles and the Viceroy, which he had forwarded privately to an officer holding an official position in England. Still less could he know that this extraordinary document, which was withheld from the Viceroy and all his colleagues, had found its way into the hands not only of those who were called in to assist the Secretary of State in coming to a conclusion on the question

<sup>1</sup>Speech in the House of Lords, August 1st, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CURZON, 1905

at issue, but even into the hands of persons engaged in writing for the English press.

On receipt of the Despatch from the Government of India, Mr. Brodrick convened a Committee in London to advise him on the main issues raised by it; and it was upon the recommendations of this Committee that the scheme adopted by the Cabinet and communicated to the Government of India in a Despatch dated May the 31st was based. Mr. Brodrick claimed for the scheme that it provided "a genuine solution" of the problem and one which would "stand any amount of hammering."

It was, as a matter of fact, a compromise which suffered in peculiar degree from the weakness inherent in all compromises. It encouraged persons holding irreconcilable opinions to believe that they had found a formula which, by some inexplicable process of reasoning, met the views of each without disregarding the opinions of the other. Under its provisions military matters in the future, as in the past, were to be administered by the Commander-in-Chief and a Member of Council. But the position occupied by the Member of Council was to differ materially from that of the Military Member of the past. He was to deal only with the quasi-civil side of army administration—army contracts, stores, ordnance, remounts and military works; all those matters in short which may be described compendiously by the word Supply. He was, in fact, to be known as the Member in charge of the Department of Military Supply. All matters of a strictly military character—appointments, promotion, discipline, training, organisation, schemes of defence and offence, the preparation for and conduct of war—were to be the direct responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, who was to be furnished with a secretariat and to submit his proposals direct to the Government of India without reference to the Member for Military Supply.

The scheme was communicated to the Government of India as the decision of His Majesty's Government; and in the same Despatch they were requested to consider forthwith the steps that would be required to give effect to it with the least possible delay, and in any case not later than October the 1st.

It was not long before the fallacy underlying the compromise

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

was laid bare. Lord Roberts, who had been a member of the Committee which evolved the scheme, stated a little while afterwards in the House of Lords, that in his opinion it was essential to the security of India that the Viceroy should not be dependent on the advice of a single soldier, however eminent and distinguished he might be. In the course of the same debate, Lord Lansdowne, who was a member of the Cabinet which approved the scheme, speaking as a member of the Government, referred to their absolute refusal to listen to Lord Kitchener's proposal to put an end to the Military Member of Council.

"We found ourselves in the position of having to decide between the demand of Lord Kitchener that the office of Military Member should be absolutely put an end to, and the view of the Government of India that it should be preserved and that he should remain very much in the position which he had always occupied, and we decided against Lord Kitchener."<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to deduce from these deliberate statements any other conclusion than that Lord Roberts and Lord Lansdowne intended that the Government of India should have at their disposal the second military opinion which they desired as a check upon the proposals of the Commander-in-Chief, or that they believed that the scheme which they had approved provided for it.

Lord Curzon, who was no party to the compromise, was under no such illusion. He realised that on the fundamental question of principle Lord Kitchener's view had been accepted and the Government of India overruled. He was prepared to resign at once, and only refrained from doing so on being implored by his colleagues not to desert them in the difficult position in which they found themselves. "The decision of the Government about the Kitchener case came the other day," he wrote on June the 21st. "I am under no illusion as to the result. He has practically triumphed, although a disembowelled Military Member has been left to prevent me from resigning. I am quite ready to do this, and Ibbetson came to tell me yesterday that he would join me in doing so. But at the same time he implored me to stay and remould the

<sup>1</sup>Debate in the House of Lords, August 1st, 1905.

organisation into something workable, so that the control of the Government of India may not go altogether by the board.”<sup>1</sup>

On June the 24th, Lord Curzon discussed the position with his colleagues, and at their request agreed to see Lord Kitchener and to invite his support for certain modifications of the scheme for submission to the Secretary of State. The meeting took place the next day and, at the end of a discussion which lasted for an hour and a half, Lord Kitchener had signified his assent to all the modifications of the scheme which the Viceroy placed before him. After consultation with Sir Edmund Elles and General Duff these were embodied in a draft and re-submitted to Lord Kitchener the following day. His reply accepting them was written the same afternoon—“Duff has explained to me the points about which you intend to telegraph to the Secretary of State. Though I cannot say that I consider some of them to be improvements on the proposals in the Despatch there are none which I am not willing to accept in deference to your wishes.”

Lord Kitchener’s attitude at this time is certainly difficult to understand, for Lord Curzon made no attempt to conceal from him his object which was, indeed, written plainly on the face of the recommendations themselves. It was probably due to a conviction that Lord Curzon’s resignation would be—as he said at the time—“a public calamity,” and that, short of the modifications proposed, his resignation was inevitable. The Prime Minister, to whom the proposals were telegraphed on June the 26th, at once perceived that the modifications asked for were designed to restore to the Governor-General and his Council the second Military opinion for which they had all along contended and to which Lord Kitchener was unalterably opposed. And so surprised was he at the Commander-in-Chief’s concurrence, that he telegraphed a request for a full statement of Lord Kitchener’s reasons for his apparent change of view. The insidious nature of the desire for compromise now became apparent. Lord Kitchener signed a telegram jointly with the Viceroy, repeating his agreement with him, and even adding in his own hand, that in the event of His Majesty’s Government being unable to accept the modifications he

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir Clinton Dawkins.

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

desired to associate himself with the Viceroy in any action which he might feel called upon to take.<sup>1</sup> And the authorities in London, oblivious of the surprise which this development had at first excited in their minds, now arrived at the happy conclusion that the modifications were, after all, in harmony with the spirit and intention of their Despatch.

It was now Lord Curzon's turn to feel surprised. So astonished was he at the discovery now made in London, that he thought it necessary to telegraph lest there had been some misunderstanding as to the intention underlying the alterations for which he had asked. Lord Kitchener and he distinctly contemplated, he telegraphed on July the 3rd, that the Military Member should be available for consultation by the Viceroy at his discretion, upon all questions, without the condition imposed by the Secretary of State's Despatch that questions of a purely military nature were to be regarded as being beyond his purview. He did not anticipate that the practice of asking for a second opinion on purely military questions would become general, but unless the power was specially reserved to the Viceroy and embodied in the rules the proposed modification would be valueless. And a week later he reiterated his explanation that his proposals, while not inconsistent with the principles of the Government scheme, did to some extent challenge their policy, "in so far as they attempt to provide the Viceroy and his Council with alternative military advice."<sup>2</sup>

Several more days were devoted to further attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable, and so successfully did the contending parties hypnotise themselves into a belief that they had achieved the impossible, that on July the 14th, the Secretary of State telegraphed officially—

"Your recommendations do not contravene the provisions of the Despatch dated the 31st May and some of them are in exact fulfilment of the wishes and intentions which it conveyed. His Majesty's Government deem it a matter of satisfaction that although Your Excellency's views are adverse to change, the points which you think it necessary to raise upon the scheme

<sup>1</sup> Telegram dated June 30th, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Telegram dated July 10th.

CURZON, 1905

itself appear to leave its general principles untouched, and that Lord Kitchener whose decided preference for more drastic changes had great weight with His Majesty's Government, is now in accord with the rest of your Government."

Among State Papers this, surely, will come to be regarded as a classical example of self-deception.

The happy illusion was, indeed, soon to be shattered. On July the 16th Lord Curzon learned that it was the intention of the Secretary of State to nominate an officer from England for the new post of Military Supply Member. He at once telegraphed that he was about to recommend Major General Sir E. Barrow for the post, as being one of the ablest soldiers in India and acceptable to both Lord Kitchener and himself, an officer moreover who was particularly well qualified to handle the difficulties with which the inauguration of the new system must inevitably be surrounded. When in reply to this representation he was informed that the Cabinet were unwilling to agree to the appointment of Sir E. Barrow, he realised that the circle had not after all been squared. Yet, even as this conclusion was being forced upon him, the illusion flickered once more into flame before finally dying out. On the very day—August the 1st—on which this decision was communicated to him Lord Lansdowne was stating in the House of Lords that the Government, having had to decide between the demand of Lord Kitchener that the office of Military Member should be abolished and the view of the Government of India that it should be retained, had decided against Lord Kitchener.

It must be admitted that on reading the report of the debate in the House of Lords Lord Curzon had good cause for bewilderment; and resolving to put the matter to a final test he telegraphed once more to the Secretary of State—

" It must be evident that I can only satisfactorily inaugurate the new system with the aid of a military colleague in whose experience, judgment and ability I have fullest confidence, and, further, that if Military Supply Member is to give general military advice to Governor General in Council as decided by His Majesty's Government and explicitly reaffirmed by

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords yesterday, he should be an officer of highest ability and qualifications."

He concluded with a hope that with these considerations before him the Secretary of State would see fit to modify the views on the matter which he had expressed, and thus enable him to accept a responsibility which he inferred that His Majesty's Government still desired him to assume.

With the despatch of an unfavourable reply to this message the illusion was finally dispelled. Lord Curzon informed Mr. Brodrick that he now realised that the Government differed fundamentally from him in the meaning which they attached to the modifications of their scheme which they had accepted, and upon the acceptance of which alone he had consented to remain in office. His own position was once more, therefore, substantially what it had been before any modifications had been made. And since he felt unable conscientiously to assist in introducing a system of Military Administration which he regarded as unworkable in operation and as calculated to imperil the control of the Government of India over military affairs, he asked that his resignation might be placed in the hands of the Prime Minister for submission to the King. On August the 16th Lord Curzon learned that this had been done, and on the 22nd the King telegraphed him the following message—

"With deep regret I have no other alternative but to accept your resignation at your urgent request. Most warmly do I thank you for your invaluable services to your Sovereign and your Country and especially to the Indian Empire."

And so promptly had the Government acted in the matter that, on August the 21st, the world learned not only that Lord Curzon had resigned the office of Viceroy and Governor-General, but that Lord Minto had been appointed in his place.

Thereafter the compromise embodied in Mr. Brodrick's Despatch of May the 31st rapidly crumbled. Lord Curzon had pointed out that if the functions of the Military Supply Member were to be confined to those suggested by Lord Kitchener, he would not have two

## CURZON, 1905

hours work a day, and he had expressed the opinion that in these circumstances the creation of the post would involve an unpardonable waste of public money and should be dispensed with altogether. The Government did not see their way to accept this advice, and when during the early days of Lord Minto's Viceroyalty, the new system came into operation, a Military Supply Department was created and a Military Supply Member was duly installed in office. His life was a brief one. As early as June 1907, a little more than a year after the inauguration of the new system, Mr. Morley, who had become Secretary of State for India, observed—almost in the words of Lord Curzon—that there appeared to him to remain under the new arrangement so little work to be controlled by the Member in charge of the Military Supply Department, that the expediency of maintaining the Department became a matter for consideration. Lord Minto's Government, while agreeing that on administrative and economical grounds the Department ought to be abolished, yet deprecated so hasty a re-opening of the question on the score that to do so would be certain to lead to a recrudescence of acrimonious public discussion. Mr. Morley grumbled, but agreed to postpone consideration of the matter for a year. It was clear, nevertheless, that the Department was doomed, and in January 1909 Lord Morley, as he had then become, issued his final orders for its extinction. Thus, after a brief and inglorious existence, the famous compromise of 1905 came to an end.

Lord Curzon's resignation took the public completely by surprise. It had been generally assumed that the critical phase of the negotiations had been successfully overcome, and there was much speculation as to the actual cause of so unexpected a development. In England, where the real question at issue was little understood, the Viceroy was reproached for resigning over the comparatively petty question of an appointment. It gave his action an appearance of personal pique. The attribution to him of such motives caused him infinite distress. "Of course I did not resign over a question of persons," he wrote in reference to comment on his resignation in *The Times*. "No one has made that mistake in India."<sup>1</sup> So greatly was his action at first misjudged, however,

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Mr., afterwards Sir, Valentine Chirol, September 14th, 1905.

## THE MILITARY CONTROVERSY

that even his friends and relations wrote in deprecatory terms of the step which he had taken ; and he felt obliged to explain his position at some length.

" You speak of my manner of leaving office as though it were unworthy of my tenure of it," he wrote in reply to a letter from his brother. " That is not my view and it will not be the view of history. Nothing has been more honourable to me than the final episodes, and so far from regarding them as a humiliation and a failure, I look upon them with pride. . . . Please do not think either that I am fuming with vexation or anger. I have, indeed, been wickedly treated, as you will subsequently learn when the facts are before you. But I am perfectly serene. . . I would not, if the whole thing had to be enacted again, leave India in any other circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

His resignation was not, indeed, without its compensations. An extraordinary wave of sympathy with him swept over India, and it is doubtful if in any other circumstances the greatness of his Vice-royalty would have received such immediate and spontaneous recognition. " Perspective has been attained with a flash of surprising intuition," he wrote on September the 14th, " and the recognition which I did not expect to garner for years is flooding in upon me from nearly every representative body or institution in India."<sup>2</sup> In a letter of sympathy with him in his trouble a correspondent had predicted an aftermath of appreciation which would assuredly one day come. " The amazing thing is that it is here already," Lord Curzon had replied. " Ever since it was announced that I am leaving India I have been inundated with telegrams, letters, resolutions from all classes and creeds, and from nearly every representative institution or association in the country. They have forgotten all the petty abuse and calumny and have united in a magnificent tribute which makes up for all."<sup>3</sup> Lord Curzon was, indeed, surprised and profoundly touched at the way in which opinion in India rallied to him—" No Viceroy has ever left India," he wrote,

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Hon F. N. Curzon, September 21st, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir Clinton Dawkins.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Sir F. S. Lely, K.C.I.E., September 7th, 1905.

## CURZON, 1905

"in receipt of such a tribute."<sup>1</sup> From one quarter only were tributes of praise withheld. Lord Curzon had wounded Indian Nationalist sentiment too deeply to admit of any early reconciliation. The Partition of Bengal was an accomplished but vehemently resented fact; his Convocation speech was a recent and bitter memory. Yet those who attacked his policy most bitterly were conscious of the greatness of his ideals. As President of the National Congress at Benares in December 1905, Mr. G. K. Gokhale indulged in "a passionate and acrid onslaught"<sup>2</sup> on Lord Curzon and all his works. But six months later, when Lord Curzon himself lay stricken with the pain of a great affliction, Mr. Gokhale wrote to him that the heart of all India would go out to him in profound and reverent sorrow. And he spoke in touching terms of the inevitable loneliness of "such rare spirits as Your Lordship who live for lofty ends and make a religion of all their work."<sup>3</sup> Time, too, has done much to show his Administration, even to those who felt humiliated by it, in a truer light. Even as I penned these words touching on Lord Curzon's resignation I received unasked, and wholly unexpected, the following tribute to his rule—"Now that the ashes of the numerous strifes are cold, all Indians are grateful to the wise statesmanship of the great Viceroy who did so much to preserve our ancient monuments and raise our educational standards. By these achievements he still lives, and generations of Indians will bless him for them."<sup>4</sup>

There is no need to dwell on Lord Curzon's remaining days in India. He had given unremitting personal attention to the details of a tour contemplated by the Prince and Princess of Wales during the winter of 1905-06; and at the express desire of King Edward it was arranged that he should remain in India to receive them on their arrival on November the 9th. This was his last important function as Viceroy, and on November the 18th, after handing over charge to Lord Minto at Bombay on the 17th, he sailed from India.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir Valentine Chirol, September 7th, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>Times of India.

<sup>3</sup>Letter dated July 19th, 1906.  
<sup>4</sup>Letter from Professor Amaranatha Jha, Professor of English at the Muir Central College, United Provinces.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

1905

IN a speech at a dinner given him by the members of the United Service Club at Simla on September the 30th, 1905, Lord Curzon made a brief but pointed allusion to recent controversies. History, he declared, would write its verdict upon them with unerring finger ; and at that he was content to leave them.

Less than a quarter of a century has elapsed—too short a time, perhaps, for history to pass final judgment on the rights and wrongs of a conflict which brought passion and tumult into the habitual quiet of a Himalayan hill-top and seared the lives, and made and marred the careers of those who, willingly or not, were caught up and swept along in its turbulent embrace. On the merits of the question over which Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener fought their Homeric battle twenty-three years ago there is at any rate still room for legitimate difference of opinion. Events since 1905 cannot be said to have settled the question in favour of either school of thought. It is true that the system in force to-day, though differing in important particulars from that set up in 1906, preserves its outstanding feature, in that the Commander-in-Chief remains paramount in all military matters and the sole adviser of the Viceroy on military questions. And for this principle the adherents of the Kitchener school can claim recent authoritative support ; for the Committee appointed in 1919 under the chairmanship of Lord Esher, to enquire into the administration and organisation of the Army in India, were unanimously of opinion that the Commander-in-Chief should continue to combine in his person the

executive and administrative control of all purely military matters. Yet, in spite of the weight of authority behind it, this opinion is not yet accepted as final, and the position of the Commander-in-Chief, though fortified by it, is far from standing unchallenged. It may, indeed, be confidently asserted that in very recent times the advisability of modifying it has once again been seriously considered.

Similarly, if experience has shown that Lord Curzon was unduly apprehensive of the establishment of a military autocracy, it has also justified his forecast that in times of stress it would be found that a burden had been placed upon the Commander-in-Chief which the shoulders of no single individual were broad enough to bear. On this point, at least, history has recorded no uncertain verdict.

When invited to give his opinion in 1904 Lord Curzon had stated that he could well believe that, with an exceptional personality like that of Lord Kitchener, the change of system which the latter advocated might have a temporary vitality ; but that as soon as the master-hand was withdrawn and ordinary men were called upon to administer a system beyond the ordinary capacity, it would infallibly break down. Lord Kitchener was oppressed with no such fears. Indeed, he declared a little contemptuously that under the system which Lord Curzon desired to see maintained the army was organised for peace, whereas in advocating change it was his object to organise it for war. Yet it was under the test of war that the system broke down precisely in the way in which Lord Curzon had predicted that it would. And the Report of the Commission which was appointed to enquire into the causes of the disastrous failure of the Administration in 1915 to carry through the campaign which the Government of India were called upon to conduct in Mesopotamia constitutes a striking justification of Lord Curzon's view. In face of Lord Kitchener's assertion it was, indeed, a jest on the part of Fate, the humour of which must have been apparent to Lord Curzon, that Sir Beauchamp Duff who had been one of Lord Kitchener's right hand men in the controversy of 1905, should not only have found himself in Lord Kitchener's shoes in 1915, administering the system which Lord Kitchener had introduced, but should have been compelled to admit in evidence before the Commission, that while *in times of peace* one man could discharge the

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

dual function imposed upon him, it was more than he could manage in *times of war*.

Sir Beauchamp Duff found, in fact, that, in the circumstances of 1915, performance of the duties of Army Member was incompatible with the discharge of the functions of Commander-in-Chief ; and whether from choice or from necessity, he decided to perform the former and to jettison the latter. The decision, if inevitable, was none the less deplorable. For it resulted in the sole adviser of the Government on Military matters being completely cut off from contact with the combatant services ; and it was notorious that the layman in Bombay knew far more of what was happening in Mesopotamia than did Army headquarters at the seat of Government. On this aspect of the case the Committee of 1919, by their recommendations, endorsed Lord Curzon's view. They were unanimous in advising the creation of a Military Council to relieve the Commander-in-Chief of the many duties which he could and ought to delegate to others ; and a majority of the Committee went further still and recommended the resuscitation of the Department of Military Supply, abolished by Lord Morley in 1909, with a Civilian Member of the Executive Council at its head.

These are matters, however, which concern the historian more closely than the biographer. Of more immediate interest to the latter is the personal aspect of the controversy. Was Lord Curzon the author of his own undoing ? Or was he an ill-used man ? And must the fact that the most brilliant Viceroyalty of our times was brought to a humiliating end, amid the dust of controversy acrimoniously pursued and deplorable in its results, be attributed to the animosity or mismanagement of others ? These are questions which the biographer is called upon to answer. Behind the explosive happenings of 1905 was being enacted a human drama, which was to leave permanent marks upon the lives of the principal performers. So much is certain. And it may also be said that the course of the controversy was determined at least as much by the personalities of the protagonists in it as by the circumstances of the time or the intrinsic merits of the matters at issue. On the one side was the Viceroy, tenacious of his opinions when once formed, fortified in this case by an experience which none of those opposed to

him could boast and by the knowledge that the whole weight of civilian opinion in India was behind him ; confirmed in the judgment at which he had arrived—if not influenced in reaching it—by that alluring command of language which enabled him to present his arguments in faultless and appealing guise ; intolerant in such circumstances of opposition which was based in his eyes on palpably fallacious reasoning. Last, but not least, imbued in high degree with a sense not merely of the propriety, but of the essential necessity of conforming rigidly in all such matters to the forms of procedure prescribed by a strictly orthodox tradition and practice.

On the other side were ranged men of equally striking personality, but of very different temperament. In the forefront of the stage Lord Kitchener a strong, isolated figure, reserved and disdainful of opposition, dogmatic and as tenacious as the Viceroy himself of his own opinions ; little skilled in the thrust and parry of debate and ill at ease consequently in the atmosphere of the Council Chamber ; unaccustomed to, and for the most part contemptuous of, the forms and etiquette of administrative procedure. In the background, but vested with ultimate control, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, the former industrious and supremely conscientious, profoundly anxious to bridge the rapidly widening gulf between the Viceroy and the Cabinet, dismayed at finding his growing convictions on the matters at issue rendering daily more difficult the task of reconciling his affection for his life-long friend with the dictates of his conscience, but imbued with a Cromwellian determination to carry through at all costs what he conceived to be his duty to the country ; and in the matter of outward forms forceful rather than felicitous in the expression of his views. The latter harassed but urbane ; distressed at finding himself caught up in the meshes of a profoundly distasteful controversy ; consumed with anxiety to play the part of a *deus ex machina*, but puzzled to know how this was to be done. “ If after all that has passed,” the Prime Minister telegraphed when he realised the uselessness of further effort, “ you still reiterate your request to be relieved of your office, I know not how to combat further what I take to be a fixed resolve, and have, therefore, with the profoundest regret communicated your wishes to the King.”

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

Of the combatants Lord Curzon was, perhaps, the one who had least reason to approach the case from any other point of view than that of its intrinsic merits. There was no personal motive to influence him in arriving at his conclusions. He was not himself likely to be affected by any decision that was come to, since he expected that he would have left India before any changes that might be ordained could take effect. He had, in fact, returned to India with the intention of remaining only so long as was necessary to put the finishing touches to such of his reforms as still required his personal direction to launch them safely on their way ; and had it not been for the crisis in Afghanistan it is probable that he would have returned to England in the spring of 1905.

Lord Kitchener was as sincerely convinced of the necessity of the changes which he advocated as Lord Curzon was of their danger. But his interest in the outcome of the controversy was necessarily of a more personal nature than Lord Curzon's, for he was at the beginning of his career in India and his own future was intimately bound up with any decision which might be taken. He made no secret of his determination to resign in the event of nothing being done to meet his wishes.

In England the situation was less simple.. It is impossible to suppose that a Minister of so conscientious a disposition and actuated by so stern a sense of public duty as Mr. Brodrick, was consciously influenced by any consideration except the public good. And with an intimate knowledge of the deficiencies of military administration in England, acquired by bitter experience during his own recent term of office as Secretary of State for War, he was inevitably predisposed to believe in the need for reform in India. When the matter had been discussed in the summer of 1904, Mr. Brodrick, as the Prime Minister subsequently reminded Lord Curzon, had been strongly in favour of Lord Kitchener's proposals. And it is no reflection upon the sincerity of his conviction to say that it received additional strength from his appreciation of the situation which would assuredly arise, if the Government were held responsible for driving Lord Kitchener from office. The Russian menace, which Lord Kitchener had specially been sent to India to prepare against, had been brought appreciably nearer. The public had been

rudely awakened to its sinister reality by the astounding episode of the Dogger Bank, where, in the dead of an October night, the Russian fleet had opened fire with shell and quick-firing guns, at a range of a few hundred yards only, on the trawlers of a British fishing fleet. Excitement had been intense. Orders for mutual support and co-operation had been issued to the Home, the Channel and the Mediterranean fleets. Battleships had been hurried hither and thither; submarines had been despatched to Dover harbour and other extraordinary measures had been taken. For forty-eight hours or more, nine people out of ten believed that nothing short of a miracle could prevent the sword from falling. In these circumstances it was plain enough that the public were in no mood to tolerate any interference with Lord Kitchener; and it is not surprising if, quite apart from their views on the intrinsic merits of the case, the Secretary of State and the Cabinet behind him were influenced by a haunting dread of Lord Kitchener's resignation.

Lord Kitchener himself was well aware of the Government's anxiety, and whether deliberately or not, he played most successfully upon it. He knew that he could look for little support in India and that his one hope of carrying his reforms lay in his ability to secure the backing of the Government and the press in England. And experience had already taught him that a willingness to make room for others in the event of his being overruled was of material assistance to him in disarming opposition. He had first threatened resignation, within six months of assuming office, on an absurdly trivial point. A G.G.O. (Government General Order) to give effect to certain instructions of the Secretary of State had been drafted in the Commander-in-Chief's office and passed to the Military Department for issue in the ordinary way. Owing to faulty drafting the order had given rise to certain misapprehensions, and Lord Kitchener being absent on the frontier, a revised G.G.O. had been issued by the Military Member to correct the false impression for which the original order had been responsible. In doing so the Military Member was acting strictly within his rights, since all such orders, as Lord Curzon subsequently pointed out, were orders neither of the Commander-in-Chief nor of Army Head-quarters, but of the Government of India represented for military purposes

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

by the Military Member. In all cases of importance, Lord Curzon explained, the Military Department would naturally consult either Army Head-quarters or the Commander-in-Chief himself before issuing an order. But to have done so in this case would obviously have been absurd. This simple explanation of the ordinary practice was interpreted by Lord Kitchener as a claim on behalf of the Military Department to which he was not prepared to assent. And on the day on which he received the Viceroy's explanation he wrote the following reply : " I do not know whether your present opinion as stated in your letter is a final ruling in the matter. If it is so, I feel there is no course open to me but to resign my present command."<sup>1</sup> Neither Lord Curzon nor his colleagues had the smallest wish to make a mountain out of this ridiculous molehill, and, rather than embark on a controversy over so small a matter, they agreed to such alterations in the existing practice as would meet Lord Kitchener's wishes.

The episode if trivial in itself was important in its results. The Commander-in-Chief had learned from it the importance which was attached to his remaining at his post. And when in the late summer of 1904 he had determined to force an issue on the larger question, he did so by proffering his resignation. It was by this means that he had secured a promise of enquiry ; and it was by the same means that he sought, when once the enquiry had been started, to speed it on its way. At any rate, so certain was Mr. Brodrick that nothing short of a speedy solution of the difficulty would keep Lord Kitchener in India, that even before the latter had submitted his own Minute to the Viceroy he telegraphed asking how soon the views of the Government of India on the question might be expected, adding in explanation of his importunity that from indications that had reached him from various quarters it appeared that Lord Kitchener was becoming "increasingly restless." All his communications during the next few weeks bore traces of the same anxiety. " My object, as you know," he wrote on January the 6th, " is to keep Kitchener, but by no means to concede what is unreasonable ; and I only press you on this because unless all his letters convey a wrong impression, he would not accept the idea

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated May 25th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1905

that no independent step was to be taken to investigate his grievance before next October." And again on January the 12th, in reply to a telegram in which Lord Curzon sought to reassure him, "Every mail he writes more and more forcibly on the particular point which you have undertaken to report on, and I doubt whether he will ever give you much cause for believing he is in earnest until he takes the step of resigning irrevocably."

And if Lord Curzon had cause for irritation at the constant pressure brought to bear upon him in deference to the susceptibilities of the Commander-in-Chief, he had equal reason for annoyance at the manner in which the case was dealt with by some at least of the leading organs of the English press. In support of an attack upon the system of administration it was broadly hinted that Lord Kitchener was being thwarted in carrying the measures on which he was engaged for the better defence of India.

"If there is any risk that Lord Kitchener's urgent scheme of defence may be vetoed or even postponed because the Viceroy's advisers decline to find the sum required or because they object to it on other grounds, that danger must be removed by the intervention of the Home Government. As between Lord Kitchener, and the Military Member of Council the nation will prefer the deliberate and considered views of the former, particularly as they are understood to be endorsed by the Imperial Cabinet. Mr. Brodrick has never lacked moral courage and we shall be surprised and disappointed if he fails to enforce the approval he has already given to the scheme, and to make it known that the Imperial Government intend that Lord Kitchener shall be supported in carrying to a successful conclusion the supremely important task that was entrusted to him by something like a national mandate."<sup>1</sup>

So persistent did rumours of this kind become, that in May Lord Kitchener himself agreed to an authoritative denial being issued to the press—

"His Excellency Lord Kitchener has represented to the Viceroy that he desires it to be known that the statements to

<sup>1</sup>*The Standard* of February 22nd, 1905.

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

which currency has been given that there is or has been any disagreement as to the military policy in general which he has recommended to the Government of India, or that his proposals for the re-organisation and strengthening of the Indian army and the defence of India have been refused or thwarted by the Government of India, are destitute of foundation. The question now under examination with His Majesty's Government is exclusively concerned with the administrative management of the Indian army."

Lord Kitchener is entitled to full credit for this generous acknowledgment of the support which he was receiving in the task of re-organising the forces under his command. But on the administrative question on which the Government of India were opposed to him he was determined to secure the verdict of the English press. And not the least of Lord Curzon's difficulties in working with him at this time arose out of his colleague's inability to appreciate the importance of exercising a rigorous discretion in discussing, outside the Council Chamber, delicate matters which were still under the confidential consideration of the Government. From the first he had failed to understand the impropriety of discussing matters of the kind with the utmost freedom with his friends in England.

"I cannot help being amused at Kitchener's unorthodox proceedings," Lord George Hamilton had written before the Commander-in-Chief had been many weeks in India. "But there is one point on which I think he ought to be warned. I meet various members of the War Office on this Imperial Defence Committee, and they tell me that schemes of wide reform and of great alterations are being put forward by Kitchener. If so they must be in private letters to the War Office or the Commander-in-Chief. I think it would be well to warn him that although communications between the two Commanders-in-Chief are always recognised, any changes of an important character in the organisation of the Indian army must be referred through your Government to the India Office here. Otherwise we shall have a double set of com-

munications, which will be the source of great embarrassment and personal friction.”<sup>1</sup>

The warning was duly conveyed and Lord Kitchener had replied that he would make it clear, in any future private correspondence, that anything he said must be regarded solely as representing his individual opinion, to which no official significance must be attached. At the same time, in view of his own lack of Indian experience, he desired Lord Curzon to point out to the Secretary of State that when he felt compelled to take up a question of grave importance, such as the organisation of the Military Department, which he fully realised might involve the possibility of his own resignation, it would be somewhat hard on him if he were debarred from seeking the advice and assistance of the officer in England who had had a longer experience in India and was in closer touch with the Government at home than any other. Lord Curzon did not dispute the reasonableness of this contention ; and had Lord Kitchener been content to restrict his discussion of confidential matters to purely personal and private communications between himself and Lord Roberts, Lord Curzon would have had little reason to complain.

In 1905, however, Lord Kitchener abandoned the restrictions upon his private correspondence which he had accepted in 1903. And as the days wore on and the controversy moved steadily towards a crisis, Lord Curzon found himself seriously embarrassed not only by matters which were the subject of discussion behind the closed doors of the Council Chamber becoming public property, but still more by the communication to persons in England of documents bearing on the case, of the contents of which he himself was kept in ignorance. Before even Lord Kitchener’s proposals had been submitted to the Government of India for their consideration, Lord Curzon learned that they had been communicated by the Commander-in-Chief to a number of senior officers under his command for their opinion ; and on Lord Kitchener expressing surprise at exception being taken to his action, Lord Curzon endeavoured once more to make clear to him the universally accepted conventions in such matters—

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated April 24th, 1903.

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

"I think, since you ask me, that your reference to the Lieutenant Generals was irregular, though I am sure that you never meant it in that light. I will explain what I mean. The question of the future military administration in India has not been referred to you individually, but to the Government of India as a whole, and you and Elles have been asked for your opinion about it as Members of that Government. According to our invariable procedure the question, while being so discussed, is private to the Government and outside authorities cannot be consulted without the consent of Government. For instance, I, as Viceroy, should not and could not consult the Heads of Local Governments on the subject without reference to Council, nor would it have been proper for Elles, without authority, to have made a reference to any military authorities."

He added that he could not himself see what the Generals could have to say about the matter, at the stage which it had so far reached, for, far from being a purely military matter, it was a constitutional question affecting the structure of the Government. Since, however, the opinions of these officers had already been invited, he assumed that they would be communicated to him as soon as they were received.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to understand why Lord Kitchener should have objected to furnishing the Viceroy with the opinions which he received. The reason which he gave, namely, that the officers had been consulted "quite privately" and that their opinions were intended for himself alone, can scarcely be held to have been a valid one, in view of the use to which they were subsequently put. For in the long and detailed criticism of the Minutes of Sir Edmund Elles and the Viceroy, to which reference has been made in the preceding chapter, forwarded by Lord Kitchener to an officer in London on March the 8th—two days actually before he had sat glum and silent at the historic meeting of Council on March the 10th—for the purpose, as he explained, of providing answers to the arguments in the Minutes, the opinions of all the Generals consulted were set forth. Lord Curzon would have had sufficient reason to

<sup>1</sup>Letters from Lord Curzon to Lord Kitchener, January 31st and February 1st, 1905.

complain had the document enjoyed even a restricted circulation in England. This was, however, very far from being the case. For while the papers forwarded by the Government of India with their Despatch of March the 23rd were still under the consideration of the Government at home, articles appeared in various newspapers which could only have been written by persons who were familiar with these documents, and amongst these a strongly worded indictment of the system by a military writer, who set out to prove to the British public that the so-called dual control of military matters in India constituted a grave public danger, *that it was denounced by almost every soldier holding a high active command in India*, and that unless it was speedily changed the army was doomed to ignominious disaster at the first touch of serious war. Though this can have been apparent to few of those who read the article, it was chiefly remarkable for the extent to which there were incorporated in it not merely the *ipsissima verba* of the Lieutenant Generals whose opinions had been withheld from the Viceroy, but whole sentences culled from the detailed reply—also withheld from Lord Curzon—which Lord Kitchener had drawn up to the Minutes of Sir Edmund Elles and the Viceroy.

While Lord Curzon was aware, from his correspondence with Lord Kitchener, how small was the importance which he attached to the accepted canons in matters of this kind, it was not until a somewhat later date that he became aware of the full nature and extent of the efforts which had been made to influence both the Government and the British public behind his back. When, during the summer months, successive mails from England brought a series of obviously inspired newspaper articles, his indignation knew no bounds. From camp under the deodars of Naldera he wrote one Sunday in June to Lady Curzon enclosing the offending writings. Was it possible, he asked, for any human being to argue that the writer had not been supplied with the whole of the confidential papers? "How one sickens of all this underhand game." Small wonder if he became bitter.

But until he realised the impossibility of attempting any longer to do so, he made strenuous endeavours to exclude all personal considerations from the controversy. On January the 21st he wrote

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

that he had just driven Lord Kitchener up to stay with him at Barrackpore. "He seems in very good spirits," he observed, "but is really a strange creature. For on Friday he insisted upon taking one of his small anti-Elles cases to Council. It was quite trivial and Kitchener had no sort of case. He got angry and rather lost his head and Council were unanimous against him. Why he will incur these petty rebuffs I cannot imagine." A fortnight later he made a further reference to the military controversy—"Then there is this odious friction between Kitchener and Elles, which he is now pursuing with relentless animosity, sticking at absolutely nothing, and which must end either in the Military Department and Elles being absolutely destroyed or in Kitchener leaving India. I am bent on not quarrelling with Kitchener personally, and so far we have not had one unpleasant word. But it is exceedingly difficult, for he is moving heaven and earth to gain his ends. . . . If you were here you might be able to exercise some influence over this wayward and impossible man." And a week later again—"I have written my Minute on Kitchener's proposals. I disagree with them altogether, as he knew that I should do. I regard them as a positive menace to the State. He proposes to set up the Commander-in-Chief as an absolute military autocrat in our administration. . . . I hope that the relations between us may not be affected. So far they are undisturbed and he is dining here to-night."<sup>1</sup>

It has seemed necessary to explain this aspect of the matter, because there was a disposition in some quarters to attribute the bitterness of the controversy and of its aftermath to an intolerant and vindictive attitude on the part of the Viceroy. That many of Lord Curzon's communications were characterised by considerable asperity of language is undoubtedly the case ; but his attitude in this respect cannot be fairly judged except in light of the nature and extent of the provocation which he received.

It is now necessary to return to the narrative of events subsequent to the fateful meeting of the Viceroy's Council on March the 10th. Distracted as Lord Curzon had been by incessant enquiries from Whitehall, while the question at issue was under the consideration of his Government, he was even more disturbed by the ominous

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Lady Curzon.

## CURZON, 1905

silence which fell upon the India Office after the issue by the Government of India of their Despatch. On May the 18th he commented pointedly on the lack of news from London in a letter to the Secretary of State—

“ As you do not seem to care to discuss in our correspondence the larger questions under examination between us—for instance you have never said one word about the military administration question, though it is eight weeks to-day since we sent it off and although I have written to you about it repeatedly with the utmost fullness and confidence—and as I have nothing to say about the smaller questions I will not trouble you this week.”

Mr. Brodrick retorted that he had merely acknowledged the Despatch of March the 23rd because he felt so reluctant to embark on any controversial topic which he could avoid. If the Viceroy wished for his personal views on the question, he would gladly give them; but as he feared that nothing that he could say would in any way modify the Viceroy’s opinion, he would prefer to confine himself to communicating the conclusions of Government when they had been reached.

“ Do not think that the above is written from any desire to make our relations more stilted and official; but I have realised lately how impossible you find it after six or seven years experience to regard it as possible that I should be able to sway your view, and we have never had a common ground on this. You think me wholly lacking in Indian experience, whereas having spent nearly fifteen years dealing directly with soldiers, I feel to have a claim to a greater knowledge of their idiosyncrasies in administration than any civilian now in political life. And I have felt it very useless to write where I could not convince.”

All pretence of cordiality had, indeed, disappeared from a correspondence which spoke eloquently of frayed nerves at both ends of the line. Lord Curzon wrote that he often wondered if it was the secret desire of the Secretary of State and his advisers to drive him

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

to resign ; and Mr. Brodrick spoke bitterly of a tone of denunciation in the Viceroy's letters which made their weekly receipt " a positive pain." As between them matters had passed beyond the possibility of accommodation, neither was any longer capable of appreciating the difficulties or the point of view of the other. Anxiety and worry were preying sorely on Lord Curzon's health. "I am getting physically very weary," he wrote on May the 9th, "not having the health that I had and feeling a strain which I truly believe exceeds many times that of any other administrative office in the world. I shall be glad of a rest."<sup>1</sup> And again at a later date—"I have had and am still having a very troubled summer. I have been almost incessantly ill, and the way in which I have been worried over this military affair has been well nigh incredible. . . . I am longing to get away from a burden which has long been distasteful."<sup>2</sup> And it is easy to understand that physical suffering did not make it easier for him to take a dispassionate view of the Cabinet's decision. At any rate when the Despatch of May the 31st reached India, he read into what he regarded as the peremptory orders of the Secretary of State overruling a powerfully argued and all but unanimous representation by the Government of India, a thinly veiled attack upon himself ; and from that day he ceased all personal correspondence with him.

The Despatch, it must be admitted, was couched in language which was little calculated to pour oil on troubled waters. It bore traces of the surprising haste with which, considering the importance of the subject—still more that it was one on which the advice of the Government of India was being set aside—it had been drawn up. The Committee had only reported on Friday, May the 26th. Between that date and the following Wednesday the Despatch was drafted, submitted to the Cabinet, approved by them and issued. In India its tone excited universal comment. Nor did it pass unnoticed in England, even in quarters where Lord Kitchener's views were generally supported. *The Times* commented pointedly on the tendency which Mr. Brodrick had more than once displayed to treat the Indian Government and the distinguished statesman at its head with less consideration than had usually been shown by those who

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Sir C. N. Eliot.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm, August 10th, 1905.

had held the office of Secretary of State for India. And it asserted that even those in India who agreed with Lord Kitchener, rather than with Lord Curzon, on the merits of the question on which they were divided were at one with his supporters in regarding the tone of the Despatch as "unnecessarily harsh."<sup>1</sup> It was characterised by Lord Ripon in the House of Lords as the greatest rebuff administered to any Government of India since the days of Lord Ellenborough's famous Despatch to Lord Canning about the affairs of Oude, and one which was framed in language in which no Viceroy of India ought to be addressed.

It is not to be supposed that Mr. Brodrick imagined for a moment that he was penning a Despatch which was destined to humiliate the Viceroy in the eyes of India and the world. It is much more likely that the driving force behind his pen was a desperate determination to leave no door open to further discussion, which he realised could only prolong a bitter and unprofitable controversy. The moment had come, as Lord Lansdowne observed in the House of Lords on August the 1st, when a decision was urgently called for.

But if it is easy at this distance of time for anyone who was not directly involved in the controversy to perceive this, it is equally easy to understand how impossible it must have been for Lord Curzon to do so at the time. He believed—and in India, at any rate, his belief was widely shared—that he and his Government had been treated with a lack of consideration unparalleled in the annals of British India since the Dependency had come under the direct administration of the Crown. And he protested indignantly against such treatment. It would be a deplorable thing, he declared, in a letter to the Prime Minister, if it became common for the Home Government "to address the Indian Government in tones of incivility or depreciation still more to parade an undisguised indifference to their views." He reminded him that the Government of India was endowed constitutionally with great and remarkable powers. Its subordination to Parliament, to the Government, to the Crown were not denied. "But habitually to ignore its advice, publicly and curtly to overrule it and to treat it as of no account," was a grave mistake. "You cannot weaken the instru-

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, June 29th, 1905.

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

ments of your rule in India without reacting on the rule itself." In matters of Imperial concern they had seen their unanimous views treated as of equally little moment in respect of Tibet and Afghanistan ; and the same thing might be said of many matters of smaller consequence. " But even more unfortunate in its public consequences is the practice with which we have for the first time become familiar since the present Secretary of State assumed office of openly publishing official rebukes or censures upon the Government, which are thereupon taken up and discussed in this country from one end to another. . . . My time is drawing to an end, and this policy of public humiliation cannot affect me much longer. But it is my duty to represent to you that it is doing incalculable harm, and that it is lowering the dignity and impairing the influence of your representatives in this country."<sup>1</sup>

Two incidents added to Lord Curzon's bitterness and sense of injury. On July the 18th, following a statement made by Mr. Brodrick in the House of Commons the day before, he addressed a meeting of the Legislative Council for the purpose of explaining the nature of the modifications of the scheme for which his Government had asked. His speech was regarded in India as a simple explanation of the terms of the agreement which had been reached. It was described in the columns of the Indian press the following day as " a restrained and almost colourless statement,"<sup>2</sup> setting forth with commendable lucidity the modifications of Mr. Brodrick's scheme which the Cabinet had accepted. The writer added that Lord Curzon was " studiously moderate " in the handling of this thorny question, and rejoiced that the controversy which had arisen had been so far satisfactorily settled that there were to be no resignations.

Lord Curzon's surprise and indignation were, consequently, profound when following a question in the House of Commons in which Sir Henry Fowler referred to the speech as " a severe and offensive criticism of the decision of the Government," he received a curt telegram from the Secretary of State, requesting him to cable home the full text of his speech so far as it related to army administration. There was only one brief passage in the speech which could reasonably be held to constitute a criticism and which, if torn from

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Prime Minister, July 19th, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>The Times of India.

## CURZON, 1905

its context, might have given rise to a false impression of the general tenour of the Address. It was Lord Curzon's misfortune that it was precisely these sentences which were extracted from the speech and cabled to the press in England—

"Whether the system thus modified will be in any way superior to that with which we have hitherto been familiar, or whether it will possess any permanent vitality the future alone will show. We have seen so many schemes of military organisation rise and fall in recent years that prophecy is dangerous. The new scheme is not of our creation. All that we have been in a position to do is to effect the removal of some of its most apparent anomalies and to place its various parts in more scientific relation to each other. We have converted the position of the Military Supply Member into one of greater efficacy and utility. We have very considerably strengthened the guarantees for civil supervision and control. In the last resort I expect that the new system like the old will depend in the main upon the personal equation for its success or failure."

That this should have been described first as "offensive" and later, when this epithet was withdrawn by Sir Henry Fowler, as "unconstitutional criticism," only shows how distorted were the glasses through which the controversy was viewed by some at least of those who took an intelligent interest in it in England. The solitary sentence in the speech to which exception might reasonably have been taken was one in which Lord Curzon recalled the sequence of events leading up to the agreement which had now been reached—

"Upon receipt of this Despatch," i.e., the Despatch of May the 31st, "the Government of India learned to their regret that the advice which they had all but unanimously tendered to His Majesty's Government had not been so fortunate as to meet with the acceptance of the latter. They were instructed to introduce without delay a form of military administration of which they learned only for the first time in the Despatch of the Secretary of State, and they may be pardoned if they were somewhat surprised at the manner in which it was thought necessary to convey these orders."

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

Though the tone of the Despatch had been the subject of universal comment in the press throughout India, it may be conceded that this last sentence might with advantage have been omitted.

Even after Lord Curzon's resignation, he was the victim of a misunderstanding which injured him further in the eyes of the public in England. On August the 10th after Lord Kitchener had submitted his detailed proposals for giving effect to the new scheme, the Viceroy telegraphed a summary of them to the Secretary of State, together with his opinion that under them the Military Supply Member would not have two hours work a day, and that in such circumstances the creation of the post would involve an unpardonable waste of public money. Lord Kitchener on seeing the summary repudiated the interpretation placed by Lord Curzon on his proposals and drafted a Memorandum criticising in detail the Viceroy's version of them. This in its turn drew from Lord Curzon a further statement, substantiating in every particular his previous summary. Since the telegram of August the 10th was about to be published in connection with Lord Curzon's resignation, Lord Kitchener demanded the publication of his Memorandum. Lord Curzon warned him that if his Memorandum was published he would be compelled to issue with it his own rejoinder; and on public grounds he deprecated the publication of papers which must give to the controversy the appearance of an acrimonious personal wrangle. Lord Kitchener insisted, and in face of his insistence the Secretary of State, though advised by Lord Curzon of the undesirability on public grounds of proceeding further with the matter, felt obliged to authorise their publication.

The immediate result was an attack upon the Viceroy for the publication, from motives presumed to be those of revenge, of a polemical victory—for so it was generally regarded—over the Commander-in-Chief. Opinion in England was reflected in the comment of *The Times* that "this lamentable spectacle ought to have been impossible," and that, if the publication of Lord Kitchener's Memorandum ought not to have been asked for and ought not to have been allowed, the publication of Lord Curzon's rejoinder was "an offence against the public interest little, if at all, less

serious."<sup>1</sup> And to the blow inflicted upon him by unmerited public condemnation was added that of the equally undeserved reproaches of his friends. In view of the fact that he had all along pointed out the objections to publication, Lord Curzon asked that it might be authoritatively made known that publication of the offending documents had been sanctioned at Lord Kitchener's request and not his own. Mr. Brodrick, while averse to withholding publication of anything which the Viceroy considered necessary for his justification, was fearful lest further public references to the matter should lead to renewed recriminations ; and on these grounds hoped that Lord Curzon would be content to let the matter rest. With this episode the controversy may be said to have come to a close.

What then must be the verdict of history on the personal aspect of the case ? With no desire to minimise Lord Curzon's own contributions to the difficulties of the situation—his proud and rebellious spirit, his intolerance of opposition, his uncompromising refusal to contemplate any substantial change in the system in which he believed, the asperity of his language in his communications with the Secretary of State, heightened no doubt by almost constant physical suffering—it still seems impossible to draw from the narrative which these pages have set forth any other conclusion than that Lord Curzon was the victim of a fate which was altogether undeserved. If, as appears to be the case, Mr. Brodrick and the Prime Minister had made up their minds in the autumn of 1904 that with Lord Kitchener insistent some change on the lines which he desired was essential, whatever the views of the Indian Government might be, Lord Curzon ought never, surely, to have been permitted to return to India. In the case of Afghanistan and Tibet he had already shown how impossible it had become for him to give a willing assent to the Government's policy ; and it must, surely, have been apparent that any expectation that he would acquiesce in a further overruling of his views on a question of crucial importance, affecting the Government of India itself, was doomed to disappointment. That he had failed to make his own position in the matter plain from the moment when it was first broached to him by the Prime Minister is scarcely to be believed.

<sup>1</sup>*The Times* of August 28th, 1905.

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

On the very afternoon on which the question had first been discussed he had sat down and written Lord Ampthill an account of what had passed—

“ This afternoon we had a private conference for two hours in the Prime Minister’s room in which he and Brodrick argued strongly for the abolition of the Military Department and the concentration of all military power in the hands of a single Department under the Commander-in-Chief. They desired me to institute a Commission to enquire into Military Administration in India. I absolutely declined. I said if they wanted this to be done it must be undertaken not by me but by my successor. . . . I was quite ready to accept the decision of the Government of India about Supply and Transport, if arrived at in my absence, whichever way it went. But I saw no reason for destroying the whole system to please K. or any one else. Lord Roberts on the whole supported me, and the result is that nothing will be done.”

It may be argued that Lord Curzon’s willingness to return after realising that an enquiry of some sort was to be held, knowing, as he did, the views of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, if not of the other members of the Cabinet, implied a readiness on his part to accept any decision at which they might arrive. It is true that he returned to India with the knowledge that a severe struggle lay before him ; but he faced it in the confident belief that on such an issue no Cabinet would overrule an all but united Government of India. And when he found, as he expected, that, with the solitary exception of the Commander-in-Chief, his Government were unanimous on the question, he made it unmistakably clear in a letter to the Prime Minister, that, in the event of the decision going against them, he would find it impossible to accept so striking a proof of want of confidence in the Government of which he had been the Head for the past six years.<sup>1</sup>

And if there be those who would condemn him for his unaccommodating and provocative attitude towards the Government which he served, let them pause, before judging him, to weigh the provo-

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated March 30th, 1905.

## CURZON, 1905

cation which he himself received. It is to afford them material for doing so, and certainly with no desire to fan into flame the embers of a painful controversy, that I have lifted the veil a little on those aspects of it which remained hidden at the time. For it has sometimes been assumed that because on many of the points touched on in this narrative Lord Curzon remained silent after his return to England, he had no case to submit to the verdict of the public. Enough has been written here to show that this was very far from being the case. In the first heat of his resentment and indignation he had thoughts of making public the whole inner history of the case. But from more than one quarter he received friendly counsel against renewing the controversy, and in particular from the Sovereign, to whose wishes he always bowed.

“ Though I deeply regret that you were unable to be in accord with views expressed by my Government at home, I cannot but hope that on your return you may consider it advisable in the interests of the British Empire at large, and especially as regards India, not to enter into any further controversy regarding the different issues with my Government which compelled you to resign.”<sup>1</sup>

Let him be given the credit to which he is entitled for subordinating all personal considerations to the public good. The decision was not an easy one, for the iron had entered deeply into his soul and the bitterness of it he carried with him to the grave. Twenty years afterwards he wrote of the story of the Viceroys as one not merely of service or of splendour, but of self-sacrifice and even suffering, not merely of honour and recognition, but sometimes of flagrant ingratitude and stark injustice. “ I use these words,” he added, “ not in any spirit of reproach, but because I think it is only right that my countrymen at home should know the conditions in which their principal servants abroad have frequently been called upon to act, and should make some endeavour to realise the sentiments of the outwardly applauded but as often secretly harassed or overridden man on the spot.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from King Edward, September 15th, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>“ British Government in India,” Vol. II.





STATUE OF LORD CURZON IN CALCUTTA  
*By F. W. POMEROY R.A.*

## CHAPTER XXXI

### RETROSPECT

1899—1905

LORD CURZON'S Viceroyalty left India a little breathless. So long as his volcanic energy was being given free rein, there was little time to pause and take stock of what was being done. Everyone concerned was kept far too busy in the doing of it, while those who were in a position to look on were bewildered by the rapidity with which they were invited to pass from the contemplation of one reform to a consideration of the next.

His vivid personality impressed itself on all who came in contact with him. One who happened to be serving in Calcutta during a part of his Viceroyalty once said to me—"When you entered a crowded room you not only at once became aware of Lord Curzon's presence there, but you knew instinctively the exact part of the room in which he happened to be." He made himself felt by others because he lived life so abundantly himself. Work in India in the highest office open to a servant of the Crown—the dream of his childhood, as he himself confessed, the fulfilled ambition of his manhood, his highest conception of duty to the State—served as a grindstone on which his emotions, always acute, were constantly being sharpened to a fine point. It was in India that he tasted with palate toned up to the highest pitch of sensibility, both the intoxicating flavour of the wine of victory and the bitterness of deep draughts from the cup of defeat. How vividly he experienced the joy of success was apparent from the note of elation that rang through so many of his speeches ; how deeply the corroding acid of suffering and despair ate into the fibre of his being was

demonstrated when he wrote of India many years later, that over the Viceregal throne there hung "not only a canopy of broidered gold but a mist of human tears," and of the task of government that "it was not a pastime, but an ordeal; not a pageant alone, but as often a pain."<sup>1</sup>

The view which he took of his task as Viceroy was characterised throughout by a comprehensive thoroughness. He paid the same minute attention to detail in small things as in great. His exalted conception of the dignity of his office led him to attach full importance to his social obligations and to the ceremonial observances appertaining to the post. And nothing caused him greater annoyance than a display of indifference towards such matters on the part of those who, equally with himself, held offices which demanded the maintenance of an adequate standard. He insisted on the Members of Council keeping house and entertaining, and on all officials conforming to the rules laid down for their guidance in matters of ceremonial etiquette. No detail escaped his notice, and deficiencies in the wardrobes of certain senior officials, that had long passed without comment, had speedily to be made good. "The uniform of a Member of Council," he wrote, "is fixed by the Lord Chamberlain's Regulations issued at home"; and he could see no reason why senior officials, who for years had shirked the knee breeches and stockings which the Lord Chamberlain decreed, should any longer take refuge "in the less dangerous but irregular trouser." If they did not set an example at the top of the scale, how, he asked, could they expect their subordinates to conform lower down?

It was all part and parcel of his avowed intention of breathing new life into a system which showed unmistakable signs of being run down. Yet, whatever else he was, he was certainly no mere figurehead and for all his Oriental love of pomp and ceremony and his dramatic sense of the importance of display, he spent by far the greater part of his time in India with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, in personal control of the administrative machine. His touch was felt in the most distant corners of the territory over which he held sway. He was not satisfied with the regular official communications which passed along the ordinary channels between the

<sup>1</sup>"British Government in India," Vol. II.

## RETROSPECT

Local Administrations and the Central Government, and he insisted on the Governors and Lieutenant-Governors of Provinces and the Residents at the Courts of Native States corresponding with him direct. Any disinclination on the part of such officials to add private letters to their official communications exasperated him, and led in more than one case to marked exhibitions of Viceregal displeasure.

His relations with his colleagues and subordinates were not always happy. A reputation for satire, not wholly undeserved, tended to keep persons who did not know him well uneasily aloof. Lord George Hamilton, most courteous of men, sought to warn him of the folly of giving unnecessary offence. "Try and suffer fools more gladly," he urged him; "they constitute the majority of mankind... Cases have come to my notice where persons have been deeply wounded and gone from you full of resentment in consequence of some incautious joke or verbal rebuke which they thought was harshly administered." But behind the dignified countenance of the Viceroy still lurked the spirit of the incorrigible boy. "I am quite certain no Viceroy ought ever to indulge in chaff or in a joke," he gravely replied; "and I have no doubt that my propensity to both forms of recreation (in a life of excessive tedium and burden) is a snare. No one understood Abraham Lincoln's jokes and stories while he was living; but I observe that they cast rather a halo round his temples now that he is gone." And no advice, however sound he himself knew it to be, could ever restrain him from plying a satirical pen. "A. is a very curious creature," he wrote on one occasion, "exceedingly vain, rather bombastic and consumed with the idea wherever he be that the hub of the universe is not far distant"; and again, "I never in my life saw two men quite like them. Their conversation is like a north-easterly gale, and for a time you are blown completely off your feet." It may safely be averred that the one feeling which he never aroused in those with whom he came in contact was that of indifference. He affected different persons in very different ways. There were some men in whom he aroused feelings of real affection; there were others in whom he excited emotions very much the reverse. By the majority of those who served under him in India he was regarded less with feelings of affection than of admiration and respect.

## CURZON, 1899-1905

He was extremely jealous of his own prerogatives, and fiercely resented any undue assumption of independence on the part of those who were technically subordinate to him. Hence his extraordinary attempt to reduce the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay—"those picturesque excrescences on the surface of the most specialised Service in the world"—to the status of Lieutenant-Governorships. "Oh! these Governors, these Governors!" he once exclaimed. "What with their susceptibilities and the influence of their surroundings, they are a queer tandem to drive. Even the best of them turn round in their traces, look at you and ask what the d——l you mean?" And if he held strong views as to the correct attitude of individual officials towards himself, he had equally definite ideas on the subject of the deference which was due from Local Administrations to the Central Government. He mentioned to the Secretary of State a case in which he had given the Head of a Provincial Government the opportunity of withdrawing "a very improper letter which his Government had addressed to us." The offer had not been well received. "I am sorry to say," Lord Curzon proceeded, "he replied in the spirit and tone of a petulant school-boy. He assumed full responsibility for every word and every line, and added that of course if I laid down that Local Governments were never to disagree with the Government of India, or to criticise the action of the latter, he would issue orders to that effect. Really this is too puerile." Such incidents showed that Lord Curzon's sense of humour—great though it undoubtedly was—was not without its limitations. For it may be confidently asserted that no one would have been more astonished or more indignant than the Viceroy himself, had Lord George Hamilton hinted—as, pondering upon certain poignant memories of his own relations with him he might have done—that examples of very similar conduct might have been brought to his notice with the aid of a mirror.

But such things were the outcome of temperament and were mere excrescences on the surface of a Viceroyalty which was great in the manner of its discharge, greater still in the measure of its fruitfulness, greatest of all in the high conception of duty by which it was inspired.

For the extent of the legislative and administrative achievements of

## RETROSPECT

his term of office Lord Curzon himself deserves the credit. Here, as elsewhere, the "middle-class method," of which he so often boasted, stood him in good stead. For it must be clear to all who have followed the story of his administration unfolded in these pages, that if he governed with imperious, and even, as some thought, with ruthless energy, he did so also on a carefully thought out plan. In every Department of Administration it was his ambition to formulate a policy not based on *a priori* reasoning, still less on personal predilection, but on a broad foundation of ascertained fact. In all important matters the invariable preliminary to the framing of a policy was the careful examination of all the ascertainable data, by bodies of men selected for their qualifications for collecting, collating and drawing deductions from the facts. Throughout the period of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty there was scarcely a day when some Commission was not sitting, or some expert was not at work collecting, sifting and generally preparing material for the administrative or legislative mill.

Lord Curzon's energy, and driving force are, indeed, proverbial; and it might with justice have been said of him, as Lord Rosebery said of Napoleon, that "in all the offices of State he knew everything, guided everything, inspired everything," and that "his inexhaustible memory made him familiar with all the men and all the details as well as with all the machinery of Government." Lord Morley did actually say of him, not without reason, that England had never sent to India a Viceroy his superior if, indeed, his equal in force of mind, in unsparing remorseless industry, in passionate and devoted interest in all that concerned the wellbeing of India.<sup>1</sup>

It is sometimes asked how it was that Lord Curzon, with all his genius for administration and the varied powers which compelled universal admiration, failed altogether to appreciate the significance of—still more to sympathise with—the rapid growth of national self-consciousness which, especially in Bengal, was taking place before his eyes? The answer is undoubtedly to be found in the deep-rooted convictions which he entertained as to the nature of Great Britain's task in India. He was not one of those who held that India had been won by the sword and must be held by the

<sup>1</sup>In a speech on February 23rd, 1909.

## CURZON, 1899-1905

sword. But he was most emphatically amongst those who believed that the destinies of the Indian peoples had been entrusted by Providence to British keeping. "To me," he declared when speaking of British rule in India at the Guildhall in the summer of 1904, "it is the greatest thing that the English people have done or are doing now; it is the highest touchstone of national duty."

Few, perhaps, would have regarded Lord Curzon as a particularly religious man; and in the matter of theological dogma or of the outward forms of church practice he was not. "They tell me," wrote a friend, some time after he left Oxford, "that your old church going habits have broken down and that you have put away religion? Is this so? If so, why?" But deep down below the cultured and sophisticated surface of the man burned a simple and very real religious faith—instinctive, rather than based on any process of reasoned thought, and almost childlike in its unquestioning acceptance of the presence, behind the chequered scroll of human history, of divine and beneficent purpose. It was no mere coincidence that he should have remarked to a friend in India, in words almost identical with those which he had employed when making a similar confession to a friend at Oxford twenty years before, that he never embarked on any undertaking, however trivial, without resorting to prayer. He never doubted, therefore, that behind the achievements of his fellow countrymen in India was the invisible hand of God.

"If I thought it were all for nothing," he exclaimed when addressing a gathering of his own people in Calcutta, "and that you and I, Englishmen and Scotchmen and Irishmen in this country, were simply writing inscriptions on the sand to be washed out by the next tide; if I felt that we were not working here for the good of India in obedience to a higher law and a nobler aim, then I would see the link that holds England and India together severed without a sigh. But it is because I believe in the future of this country and the capacity of our own race to guide it to goals that it has never hitherto attained, that I keep courage and press forward."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Speech at a banquet of the Chamber of Commerce, February 12th 1903.

## RETROSPECT

In such a view of India there was no room for an Indian Intelligentsia aspiring to lead and speak for the masses ; and in so far as the Indian educated classes claimed to be the prophets of what they themselves spoke of as “the new Nationalism” which was stirring in the land, he simply brushed them aside. The India which he pictured to himself was a land of vast spaces peopled by a patient and primitive peasantry, content to raise their crops and rear their cattle and to leave all other things to the superior and, on the whole, beneficent Power to whom chance or Providence had entrusted them. This is clear from his own admission frequently made. “Amid the numerous races and creeds of whom India is composed,” he declared in the course of his farewell speech at the Byculla club in Bombay, “while I have sought to understand the needs and to espouse the interests of each—my eye has always rested on a larger canvass, crowded with untold numbers, the real people of India, as distinct from any class or section.” He was sometimes assailed with doubts and questionings, puzzled by the tremendous mystery of it all—“Your public men in England,” he told his audience at the Guildhall, “have not before them the haunting question which is always before us in India, like a riddle of the Sphinx—what is in the heart of all these sombre millions, whither are we leading them, what is it all to come to, what is the goal ?” Yet after all what need to ask ?

“The ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,  
But right or left as strikes the Player goes ;  
And He that toss’d thee down into the Field,  
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows !”

And from idle speculation Lord Curzon turned with renewed vigour to the task in hand—that of securing justice for, and some amelioration of the lot of, the Indian peasant. If the administrator could raise, even by a little, the level of material comfort and well-being in the lives of those who were the bone and sinew of the country, those by the sweat of whose face the soil was tilled, those who should be the first and final object of every Viceroy’s regard, he had earned his reward.

He was equally outspoken in his views on the subject of political concessions. Such concessions could not help, they could only hinder Great Britain in the discharge of the task which had been committed to her hands. "More places on this or that Council for a few active or eloquent men will not benefit the *raiyat*." This was a cardinal article of his belief. "That I have not offered political concessions is because I did not regard it as wisdom or statesmanship in the interests of India to do so"; and he added that when he was vituperated by those who claimed to speak for the Indian people he felt no resentment and no pain—"For I search my conscience and I ask myself who and what are the real Indian people?"<sup>1</sup>

Thus there was fashioned in Lord Curzon's mind an image of India very different from that which was being built up in the minds of the apostles of the new Nationalism. And it was wholly in keeping with his almost Patriarchal conception of the relations between himself and the India of his vision, that he should have come to believe that his own judgments of what was in her interests were the judgments of the Indian people. This was the public opinion—opinion which had passed through the sieve of his own approval—which he bade the authorities in England not to ignore. This was the public opinion which he had in mind when he warned the British Government that one of the greatest dangers with which British rule in India was likely to be faced would arise from an impression, should it ever gain substantial foothold in the land, that injustice or neglect were displayed towards her by those who claimed to govern her from London. "It is better to make a stand for India," he advised Mr. Brodrick on his appointment to the India Office, "and to be beaten by your colleagues than to make no stand at all." And it was more than anything else his openly expressed assumption that it was in him, as the representative of the race chosen by God for its loftier standards—administrative, cultural and moral—to be His instrument in leading India along the road to higher things, that reposed the sole right of speaking for the Indian peoples, that earned for him the dislike of the educated classes.

<sup>1</sup>Speech to the Byculla club, Bombay, November 16th, 1905.

## RETROSPECT

The more thoughtful among the Indian Nationalists showed a subtle appreciation of his point of view. "His idea clearly is to strengthen England's hold on India and to establish her here as India's permanent overlord, yet at the same time to secure some sort of autonomy subject to this overlordship for the Indian Government as representing the interests of the Indian people." And they gave point to their analysis by contrasting Lord Curzon's aims with the policy of Lord Ripon. "Lord Ripon's ideal was to secure, by slow degrees, autonomy for the *Indian people*. Lord Curzon's is to secure it for the *Indian Government*."<sup>1</sup> They did not deny that his term of office had been fruitful in measures designed to benefit the agricultural classes ; but viewing his policy from their standpoint, they attributed his solicitude for the masses not so much to an altruistic desire to render them service, as to a Machiavelian design to rivet the overlordship of Great Britain more firmly upon the country. They themselves perceived that the conflict between the spirit of the new Nationalism and foreign domination must eventually be decided by the great body of the agricultural population ; and they credited Lord Curzon with a similar perspicacity. "He has, therefore, been trying to win the good will of the people, and to prevent any powerful combination between them and the educated middle classes. . . . The whole body of agrarian legislation undertaken by His Lordship's Government has, evidently, also this one end in view. Remissions of land-revenue, institution of agricultural banks, revision of the famine code, inauguration of a new irrigation policy—all these are clearly meant to ingratiate the present rule and the present *regime* into the favour of the immense agricultural population of this country."<sup>2</sup>

This view, though natural enough in the circumstances in which it was formed, did Lord Curzon very much less than justice. And the verdict of history will assuredly be that great as his Viceroyalty was, judged merely by the nature and extent of its legislative and administrative achievements, it was infinitely greater by reason of the exalted standards of duty and honour by which it was inspired. The grandeur of his conception of the task entrusted to him fired the idealism in his nature and called forth from the depths of his

<sup>1</sup>New India of August 20th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., July 15th, 1903.

## CURZON, 1899-1905

being a passionate desire to build on a firm foundation of righteousness and justice. "The sense of being able to do something, to effect some good, to leave something better than you found it, is a perpetual incentive and consolation."<sup>1</sup> Men who had known him and observed him closely in the days when he had passed from youth to manhood, who had plumbed the depths of his keen enthusiasm, his generous impulses, his high resolves and his fine ideals, perceived clearly enough the spirit in which he worked. "Your service does not seem to me in any way to be prompted by any selfish motive," wrote one who had enjoyed the privilege of that close intimacy with him which grew up within the charmed circle of the Crabbet club, "but only by a Titanic upheaving force regulated, controlled and directed by reasoning patriotism. . . . What a miracle you are. No other man that I can see in the public service who is a poet, who will work for a noble ideal. And what makes it finer still," he added with a touch of quaint humour redolent of the whimsies of Crabbet club days, "is that you cannot hope to found a dynasty. No Minister, however great, is anything more now than the managing director of a joint stock company."<sup>2</sup>

Certain it was that to Lord Curzon the task committed to him was most amazingly worth doing. "Here we do big things on a big scale," he wrote to Rennell Rodd, "and the sense of spaciousness would delight your imaginative sense." Indifference at home to the work of Englishmen in India filled him with despair. "How few are there who know anything or care anything about the British dominion in India, though it is the miracle of the world."<sup>3</sup> For him British achievement in India bore unimpeachable witness to the character of the British race. The basis of British dominion in India, he declared at the Guildhall, in 1904, was neither military force, nor civil authority, nor prestige, though all these were part of it. But if it was to endure, it must rest on a more solid foundation—"it must depend on the eternal moralities of righteousness and justice."

Even-handed justice between man and man and between race and race—that was the test by which he would himself have desired that

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Mrs. H. White, dated March 9th, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Mark Napier, May 3rd, 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Sir F. E. Younghusband, September 19th, 1901.

## RETROSPECT

posterity should judge him. His constant reference to it in private conversation, in a voluminous correspondence and in public speech was not cant ; it was the spontaneous expression of an ever present thought. It coloured the whole of his outlook upon Indian affairs and was a guiding principle from which he never departed. "I have never wavered in a strict and inflexible justice between the two races," he wrote. "It is the sole justification and the only stable foundation of our rule."<sup>1</sup>

It was pursuit of this ideal that enabled him, one of the most sensitive of men, to scorn popularity and to press forward, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, along the narrow way of duty. He knew well how easy it would be to achieve popularity with one race or the other and even better, perhaps, how easy it was to loose it. And it is one of the most convincing testimonies to the rigid impartiality of his rule, that with Indians and Europeans alike he passed successively from pinnacles of popularity to corresponding depths of disapprobation. "In my own case during the last five years," he wrote, describing the attitude of the British community in India towards him, "he,—the non-official European—'has passed from gusts of enthusiastic applause to whirlwinds of tempestuous denunciation !'" Native opinion was equally unstable. "The organ that has denounced you one day as a fiend," he told Mr. Brodrick, "will laud you the next day as a God." That he was acutely sensitive to criticism and denunciation is undoubted. "Much gratitude is not born in India," he wrote in a moment of great bitterness, "and the stoutest heart sometimes quails under the misrepresentation and abuse." And he confessed to having given orders, on his return to India in December 1904, that certain newspapers, both native and European, which were indulging in violent attacks upon him, were not to be shown to him so long as they persisted in their abuse. "It cannot do good to a man to be overpraised. But equally can it not do good to him to be over abused, for it tends to poison the mind and embitter the heart."<sup>2</sup>

But always at times of emotional stress there welled up from his innermost being, derived from the simple and childlike faith that was

. 'Letter to Lord George Hamilton, September 23rd, 1903.

<sup>1</sup>'Letter to Lady Curzon, December 13th, 1904.

## CURZON; 1899-1905

his, the sustaining strength of a great moral courage, on the wings of which he rose superior to all weaknesses and doubts. And as he stood for the last time addressing a gathering of his own people on the shores of India, it was in glowing sentences and with legitimate pride that he held up before them the tenets of a great ideal—

“ A hundred times in India have I said to myself, Oh that to every Englishman in this country, as he ends his work, might be truthfully applied the phrase ‘ Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity.’ No man has, I believe, ever served India faithfully of whom that could not be said. All other triumphs are tinsel and sham. Perhaps there are few of us who make anything but a poor approximation to that ideal. But let it be our ideal all the same—to fight for the right, to abhor the imperfect, the unjust or the mean, to swerve neither to the right hand, nor to the left, to care nothing for flattery or applause or odium or abuse—it is so easy to have any of them in India—never to let your enthusiasm be soured or your courage grow dim, but to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of his ploughs, in whose furrow the nations of the future are germinating and taking shape, to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment or a stirring of duty where it did not exist before—that is enough, that is the Englishman’s justification in India. It is good enough for his watchword while he is here, for his epitaph when he is gone. I have worked for no other aim. Let India be my judge.”



PRINTED BY  
THE STANHOPE PRESS, LTD.  
ROCHESTER, KENT





